

ISSUE 158 CHRISTMAS 2017

THE XBOX ONE AND XBOX 360 MAGAZINE



XBOX

THE SPECIAL MAGAZINE



PLAYERUNKNOWN'S

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Into the Unknown

ISSUE 158 CHRISTMAS 2017

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PRINTED BY

William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

DISTRIBUTED BY

Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

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ISSN 2053689

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■ **Stephen Ashby**
Editor

Steve's beard is quickly getting out of control. Friends and family are concerned, and people on the street are starting to stare. The OXM team are worried. Will he ever shave? Maybe next issue...

I can't count the number of times I personally have been dropped onto an uninhabited Russian island with 99 other magazine editors and forced to fight for survival. The fact that I am here writing this should tell you everything you need to know about my fighting style (hint: it involves a lot of scratching and hair pulling). Perhaps that's why I'm really looking forward to playing *PUBG* when it finally lands on Xbox One in December – at last, I will be able to fight for my life while also lounging on a sofa and eating crisps. Heaven! This month we spoke to Brendan Greene, aka PlayerUnknown, about his hit title, as well as some of the team bringing the game to Xbox One this winter (p42). We also chatted to MachineGames about Nazi-punching fun in *Wolfenstein II* (p52). Oh, the Reviews section (p66) is absolutely packed this month, too. Enjoy!

THE OXM TEAM



■ **Daniella Lucas**
Deputy editor

Dani is heading to Japan next week for an epic holiday/gaming pilgrimage. We expect her to return with an extra suitcase full of adorable plushies.



■ **Warren Brown**
Senior art editor

Warren managed to kick his *Destiny 2* habit this month. Unhelpfully, Activision announced DLC days later. Will the cold turkey treatment last? We'll find out...



■ **Russell Lewin**
Production editor

Reading this box on this page is Russell's favourite part of every month. "How did you know what I was about to say?" he asked, after reading this. Muhaha!



■ **Samuel Roberts**
Contributor

Last month, Samuel revealed his dark side playing *GTA Online*. This month he talks about murder mysteries in *LA Noire*. Should we be worried about him?

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Everything you can look forward to over the next 100 or so pages

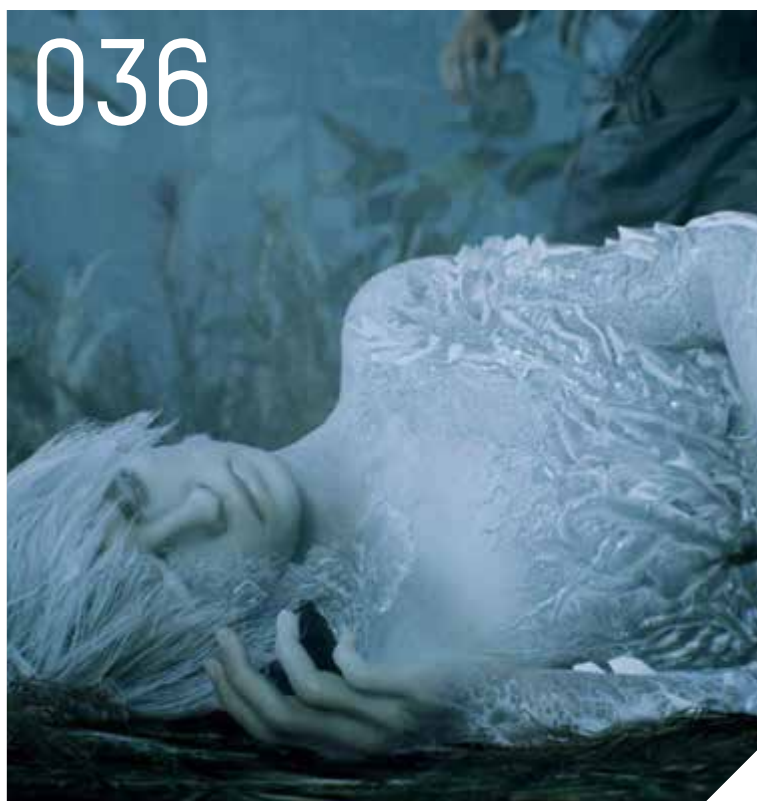


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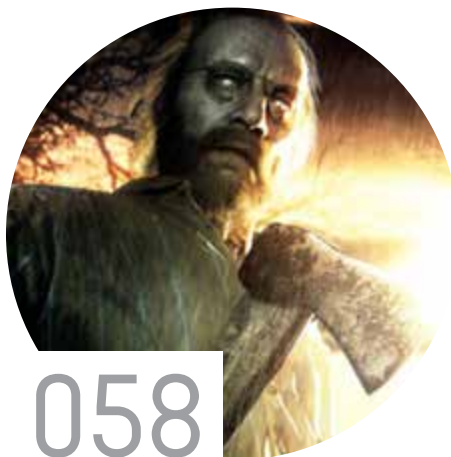
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→ HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY? WHY NOT WRITE TO TEAM OXM AT [OXM@FUTURENET.COM](mailto:oxm@futurenet.com)

insider



It's never easy to see a great-looking game in trouble – we've already shed a lot of tears over the cancelled *Scalebound*, but this time it's the untitled single-player **Star Wars** (p08) game that's in trouble. It's a huge surprise given the big names behind it, but EA has dropped the studio and is taking the game in another direction. What does that mean exactly? Read our analysis to get the full picture. There is good news this month though: after Square Enix dropped IO Interactive, the studio is back with some **Hitman** (p12) news, including new modes, a Game Of The Year Edition and the return of its excellent Elusive targets. Great if you missed them the first time around. Elsewhere we take a look at an intriguing indie puzzler called **Projection: First Light** (p14) that reminds us a lot of *Limbo* with its side-scrolling, dark world. But thankfully there are fewer spiders. Sadly, we end on more bad news as **LEGO Dimensions** (p16) comes to an end far sooner than expected due to the toys-to-life genre losing popularity. A sad day indeed.



008



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008





BYE BYE
JEDI

The end of an EAra

After years of work on an all-new Star Wars adventure, EA has announced that Dead Space creator **Visceral Games** is set to close



EA has confirmed the closure of Visceral Games, the studio that had been working on an action-adventure title set in the *Star Wars* universe. The project, which has been in development for several years, will now see a "significant change" which sees the title shift to become a "broader experience". No, we aren't entirely sure what that means either, but we suspect it may result in a less unique title. Excuse us for a moment – we're just going to have a little cry.

The game was promising a single-player, story-driven linear adventure – similar in style to the *Tomb Raider* series. After titles like *Star Wars Battlefront II*, which offer primarily a multiplayer focus, many fans were excited to see what kind of story might be created in the wider *Star Wars* universe. Unfortunately, it seems that they will never get to see what the final game would have looked like.

Patrick Söderlund, executive vice president of EA, explained the reasons for closing the studio, and for changing the style of game that the *Star Wars* title will be: "Throughout the development process, we have been testing the game concept with players, listening to the feedback about what and how they want to play, and closely tracking fundamental shifts in the marketplace. It has become clear that to deliver an experience that players

will want to come back to and enjoy for a long time to come, we needed to pivot the design."

On the money

This statement gives no specific details and so, of course, could mean many things. To us, it sounds like single-player experiences like this don't offer much replay value, and without multiplayer modes there is little reason to keep going back to them. From a business perspective, that means a lower long-term spend – once you've bought the game, that's it. No microtransactions, story-led DLC that is expensive to create, and certainly no loot boxes. These are all things which help contribute to making a game profitable in the long-term, and in modern gaming it seems like they are, for better or worse, becoming increasingly important.

What does this mean for the game, and for the employees that work at Visceral? Well, there are going to be some fairly substantial changes all round. Söderlund's statement also confirms that Visceral will "be ramping down and closing, and we're in the midst of shifting as many of the team as possible to other projects and teams at EA." With so many teams across the globe, there are plenty of places that the talent at Visceral could go, so we're keeping our fingers crossed that EA will find places for many of them as we enter 2018.

Far, far
away...

It seems that the change in studio will also have a serious impact on the release date of the new *Star Wars* title. Söderlund says that "while we had originally expected this game to launch late in our fiscal year 2019, we're now looking at a new timeframe that we will announce in the future." We were already assuming the game wouldn't launch until the end of 2018 at the earliest, so don't be surprised if that slips into 2019...





010

→ The talent in the team itself is exemplary – there were some big industry names with serious pedigree working on the game, like Amy Hennig and Kim Swift. Then, of course, there is the rest of the Visceral team – the studio's previous work includes titles such as *Battlefield Hardline* and the exceptional *Dead Space* series. The studio has real history.

Hive mind

As for the game itself... well, let's just say it sounds like there are going to be some major changes to the kind of *Star Wars* title we're going to be playing when it does finally launch.

"We will maintain the stunning visuals, authenticity in the *Star Wars* universe, and focus on bringing a *Star Wars* story to life," says Söderlund in his statement. "Importantly, we are shifting the game to be a broader experience that allows for more variety and player agency, leaning into the capabilities of our Frostbite

"We will maintain the stunning visuals in the *Star Wars* universe"

engine and reimagining central elements of the game to give players a *Star Wars* adventure of greater depth and breadth to explore."

Let's break that down then, shall we? Firstly, the game will have a shift to allow for "more variety and player agency". Could it be that the preset male protagonist could be gone in favour of a player-designed hero, or one that can be customised? Perhaps, but the statement could also refer to player choice, with a decision system that affects the world around you. Think *Mass Effect*

and you'll know the kind of thing that we're talking about.

Paired with the statement that Söderlund made about creating a game that players will want to come back to for a long time, many have suggested that this statement may mark this as a shift to a multiplayer title. With comments about making the game deeper and broader, could this refer to a shared-world shooter, like *Destiny*? If so, it would be an odd choice – EA's *Anthem* seems to be lining up to fill that gap, so another similar title will only add more competition to the genre.

Either way, it's fair to say that the game that fans have been anticipating is no longer the game that EA are planning to deliver. This may not be a bad thing – for all we know, there were major problems with Visceral's *Star Wars* title, and EA have intervened before things got worse. Perhaps these changes will result in a better, more rounded game that will



TOP *Battlefield Hardline* wasn't the greatest in the series, but Visceral tried new things.

OXM SAYS



▶ **Stephen Ashby**

It's really sad that the team at Visceral won't get to see this one through to the end. Still, it's good to hear that EA is trying to shift staff to other teams and projects within the company. I'm an optimist, so I'm hopeful the finished game will be great.



▶ **Daniella Lucas**

I was really looking forward to a single-player *Star Wars* game – that universe feels at its best when focusing on small stories in big spaces. Big battles feel so overdone now – they'll be out of fashion by the time its replacement comes out.



▶ **Warren Brown**

The Dark Forces: Jedi Knight games were one of my favourite series on PC. Exploring the *Star Wars* expanded universe in a single-player campaign feels like stepping into the movies. I really hope the Visceral game survives.

PURE TALENT

The team behind Visceral's *Star Wars* title had some serious pedigree...

The team at Visceral was lead by Amy Hennig, who was previously head writer and creative director for the award-winning *Uncharted* series at Naughty Dog. The team at Visceral were being assisted by Motive – headed up by Jade Raymond, who led the creation of the first *Assassin's Creed* game, and was executive producer on *Assassin's Creed II*. Also on the team at Motive is Kim Swift, co-creator, level designer and team lead for *Portal* at Valve. See what we mean? Talent!



do the franchise justice. With so little information about Visceral's game out there, it's hard to say for sure.

Going global

The outcome of all of this is that we now know even less about a game that we didn't really know very much about in the first place. We do know a few things, though. "A development team from across EA Worldwide Studios will take over development of this game, led by a team from EA Vancouver that has already been working on the project," said Söderlund. A leaked email obtained by Kotaku suggests that Steve Anthony, an executive producer at EA, will lead the team, and that assets developed by Visceral for the title will be used as the foundation for the new game. Amy Hennig's involvement isn't yet confirmed, but we're hopeful that both Hennig and Swift will have a place on the new team. The announcement and the delay are disappointing, but here's hoping it will result in a game that is truly the *Star Wars* adventure we've been wanting. ■

Stay tuned to future issues of OXM for updates on EA's *Star Wars* title.

ABOVE Amy Hennig discusses concept artwork designs with Doug Chiang, production designer on the *Star Wars* movies.

RIGHT Dante's *Inferno* showed a different side to Visceral back in 2010.



011

→ HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT VISCERAL? TELL US AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK



Agent 47's greatest hits

Hitman Season One returns with an expanded Game Of The Year Edition

Having parted company with long-time publisher Square-Enix, Io Interactive's fan-pleasing

celebration of independence has been to add a great splodge of icing and a handful of cherries to the cake for its episodic masterpiece, *Hitman*.

Hitman: Game Of The Year Edition adds a brand new Patient Zero campaign involving sinister cultists, shadowy corporations and a target whose elimination triggers the release of a deadly virus. Agent 47, being an assassin who generally sides with the good guys, is the key to stopping it spreading into a global pandemic.

Into the mixer

Patient Zero spans four of the existing levels – Bangkok, Sapienza, Colorado and Hokkaido – which have been remixed with new characters, new music and a different time of day. *Hitman*'s intricate levels are ideally suited to hosting additional scenarios in seldom-used areas, and previous bonus missions such as Landslide and The Icon have shown us new angles to Io's multi-layered design. Unlike the first campaign, which was drip-fed to us over nine months in 2016, all of Patient Zero is ready to go and available for instant bingeing.

In addition, there are three new costumes to wear, each of which comes with a special weapon and a unique Escalation contract. There's a sniper outfit that comes with a rifle that not only has four levels of zoom and a silencer, it also lets you slow down time to line up the perfect shot.

"A sniper outfit comes with a rifle that lets you slow down time to line up the perfect shot"

The cowboy suit includes a magnum pistol that can shoot through walls and send multiple enemies flying, while Corky the Clown (from *Hitman: Blood Money*) has a baseball bat that makes clown noises every time you brain somebody with it. Completing the contracts allows you to use all this gear in the rest of the game.

The new campaign and outfits are included as standard with the full-price GOTY package, but existing *Hitman* players can upgrade for \$20 (the UK price wasn't available as this issue went to press), which seems

Like a ghost

Elusive Targets are 26 special contracts that cropped up during the game's first season.

Appearing for a few days each, you had just one shot at them – fail (or fail to notice a new one was online) and you would never see it again. The ones we caught were really good, and luckily Io has seen sense and made them available again. Sadly they will still only appear for a few days at a time, and you can't replay ones you already finished or failed.

ABOVE Night time brings a new look to the opulent Bangkok hotel level.

RIGHT Not even a hazmat suit will save this guy. Sorry pal.

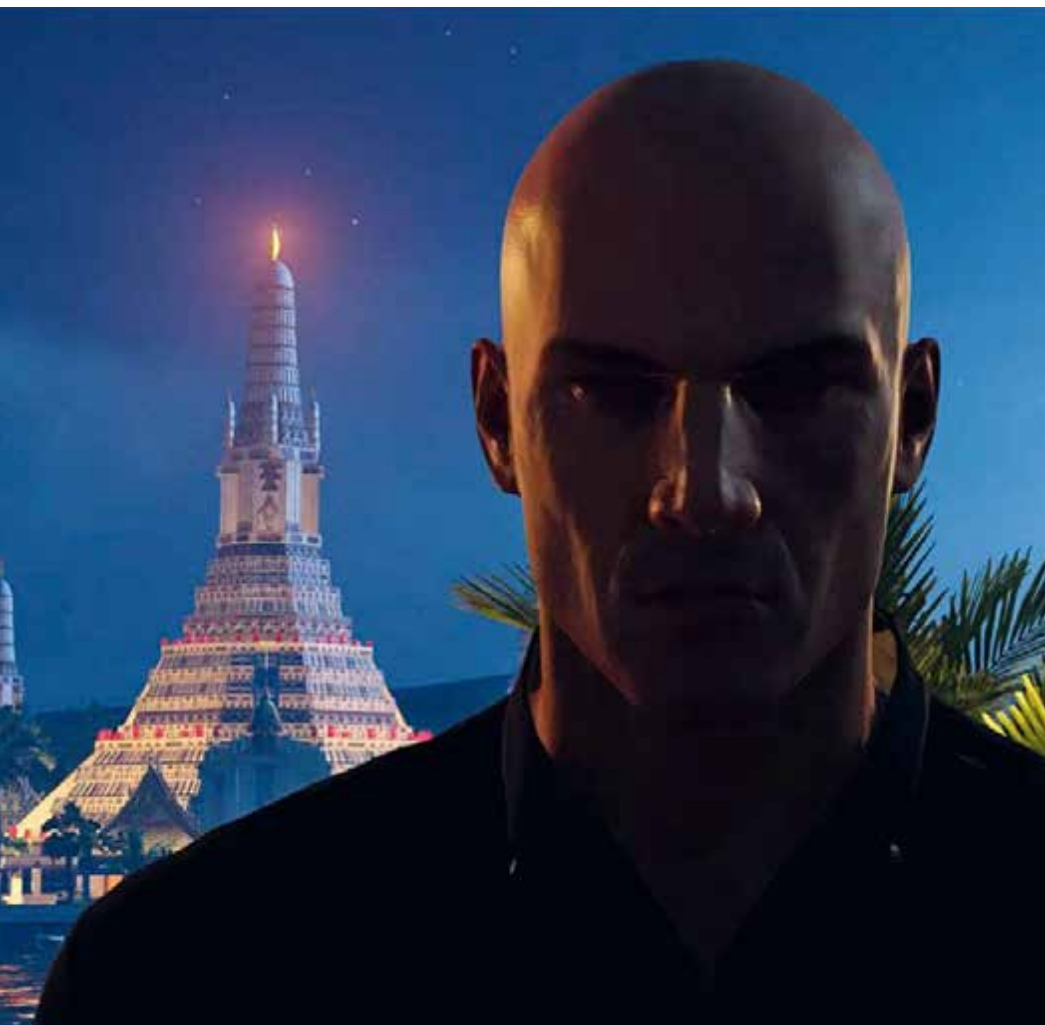


about par for the course when you consider how much story mode expansions generally cost in the games that still have them.

For those who don't want to pay, but perhaps haven't played for a while, the base game has received a considerable revamp that's well worth checking out. The user interface has been reworked, all locations have had a fresh lick of paint, including adjusted lighting and new skyboxes, and the excellent Contracts mode has been given a few new options to further refine user-created hits. There's also 4K support and an enhanced framerate for Xbox One X owners, which is good news for anyone keen to see what their shiny new console can do. ■

Hitman GOTY Edition is out now.

→ EXCITED? HORRIFIED? LET THE WORLD KNOW AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK



PLAY/EJECT

THE THINGS PUSHING OUR BUTTON (OR NOT)



DLC is your Destiny

Destiny 2's first DLC, *Curse Of Osiris*, will land on Xbox One on 5 December. Expect a journey to Mercury featuring new raid content and lots of stuff to shoot.



Metal Gear Incoming

Konami has confirmed that the survival spinoff to *MGSV* will launch on 22 February 2018. You can pre-order now to get some gold weapons – and face paint! Or... don't.



IT. IS. HERE.

The wait is finally over and we have our hands on the Xbox One X! It is an *astounding* console.



Guaca-maybe

After announcing a sequel to the brilliant action platformer, DrinkBox Studios sadly didn't confirm an Xbox One version of the game. We think it will happen, but when?



Total Sellout

You'll be lucky to find an Xbox One X before Christmas, according to Microsoft. It's just so damn popular!



Time's up

With so many massive game releases in the last few weeks, we just can't physically play everything we want. We need more time!



PUPPET
MASTER

Light Show

Explore a dark, Limbo-like world in
Projection: First Light

We love a good, moody-looking game, especially when it reminds us of *Limbo* – one of the greatest indie games we’ve played. But while this new effort from Shadowplay Studios features a similar, dark look this is a very different prospect. For one, we haven’t seen any horrible giant spiders yet and it seems to be a touch more wholesome.

This puzzle-platformer follows Greta as she explores several different cultures, meeting heroes along the way in her pursuit of self-enlightenment.

She has the nifty ability to be able to manipulate a ball of light, so if there’s a gap you can’t quite jump over then you can push the light further away so it casts a solid black shadow which you can then use as a platform. Later on you’ll also be able to use it to fight enemies or illuminate pathways. It’s such a simple yet intriguing mechanic we can’t wait to get to grips with. ■

Projection: First Light will hit Xbox One in summer 2018.



ATTACK THE BLOCKS



ABOVE You'll have to find other ways to smash franchises into one another.

LEGO lets go

Warner Bros makes the rumours official: **LEGO Dimensions** is dead

LEGO Dimensions, the ambitious mix of pop culture, games and LEGO has officially ceased production. A statement posted on TT Games' Twitter account read: "Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment, TT Games, and The LEGO Group would like to thank fans for their ongoing support of **LEGO Dimensions**. After careful consideration, we will not be producing new expansion packs for the game beyond what is now available."

This means there will be no further expansion sets released for **LEGO Dimensions**, so any releases you were looking forward to will no longer be coming. There is still set to be server support for the foreseeable future, though, so anybody who does own the game and existing expansions will be able to continue having their build-'em-up fun. At least until the plug on that is pulled.

Away from *Dimensions*, TT Games is continuing to work on its more traditional output of LEGO games like this year's *The LEGO Ninjago Movie Video Game* and *LEGO Marvel Super Heroes 2*. So there is at least some good news to report, with no major round of lay-offs as is often seen when a franchise is ended.

The original plan for **LEGO**

Dimensions would have had the game releasing a new season of expansions over the coming year. While things had run well enough for the first two years from a release point of view, sluggish sales of certain add-on packs – and unavoidably expensive manufacturing costs, thanks to the use of actual, proper LEGO in sets – meant the series' future was rumoured to be in doubt for several months.

LEGO going gone

These rumours first appeared on LEGO gaming fan site Bricks To Life back in March 2017, with a follow-up report in early October from Eurogamer, followed not long after by Warner's official statement. Players of *Dimensions* had been noticing a distinct lack of regularity in updates to the game through 2017, as well as the removal of placeholders for upcoming levels in the game. It seems that the writing was on the wall for far longer than many realised.

LEGO Dimensions joins *Disney Infinity* on the scrapheap, and with *Skylanders* 'on hiatus' we have quickly moved from toys-to-life being the biggest thing in gaming to having no big toy gaming franchises on Xbox. Life – and business – comes at you fast. ■



BARREL WATCH

GAMING'S FAVOURITE
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Red Dead Redemption 2

The Wild West may have been a deadly place to live, but it's also when the barrel was perfected to withstand possible gang shootouts.



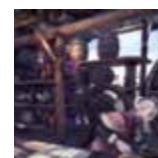
Kingdom Come: Deliverance

This takes me back to my schooling days when I learned coopering – you can see the start of a mighty barrel being made right here.



Resident Evil 7

It may be dark and grimy in the mines, but a steel drum is as hardy as it is beautiful, able to withstand even the toughest Mold infestations.



Monster Hunter: World

You can't get more perfect a spot than this. A pub on a wooden ship. I think I might just faint with excitement. The shelves are heavy with wood.



Call Of Duty

A sturdy soldier joining the war effort here, alongside his spare tyre squadmates, who sadly didn't survive the fighting. May they rest in peace.

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Steve Hogarty is...

The Fixer

This month, Steve accidentally **loses a save game** and, naturally, vows to somehow eradicate the entire concept

There is a long-held belief among some philosophers that we die each time we fall asleep, and that we are born anew each morning, a perfect clone of our yesterday-selves, preloaded with an entire lifetime of memories we never actually lived, and totally oblivious to our consciousness being just a few seconds old. Leading brainologists say that this is most likely rubbish, but the jury is out, and that's good enough reason to have a complete existential breakdown every time you begin to doze off.

If the theory is true however, then each night you are, in a technical sense that neatly leads into this month's topic, *saving your game*. And each morning you're loading it all up again, and hopping back into the driving seat with all your stats and incomplete quests intact. (To extend the metaphor to its morbid breaking point, my grandad died in his sleep, which is likely the equivalent of turning the console off while the little autosaving icon is spinning around.)

The saved game as we modern gamers would recognise it has been around since *The Legend Of Zelda* on the NES. The cartridge came equipped with an internal battery in order to store your progress, because remembering virtual things costs real electricity. Of course we all know that these days saved games are stored in a huge wooden crate in Microsoft's back garden, and are readily accessible at any time thanks to the magic of the cloud, but in all the years that we've been saving our games, few developers have been able to solve the problems of progress-logging.

The problem

No other mechanic presides over a game's atmosphere more than its save game system. Not one. Often developers will get it right, implementing a save game system that perfectly matches the game's mood. This is most true in horror. Consider



"Let's force players to finish every game in one sitting with one life"

how the Xenomorph in *Alien: Isolation* could still skewer you on its tail while you were desperately attempting to save. Or in open-world RPGs. The consequences of your decisions in *The Witcher* typically don't reveal themselves until long after you've made them, preventing you from



slinking backwards in time to choose another path, in case you get a nicer shield or get to do a kiss on a lady.

But if you can save your game at any time, the most harrowing of horror games are reduced to a fart-about whimsy parade for children, in which you can comically bungle into haunted towers consequence-free, as respite from your stupid decisions is but a menu screen away. And on the other side of this dirty coin, games that ration out opportunities to save can inadvertently burden you with crippling indecision, as you deliberate over the most trivial of choices, hesitating before picking up a pen or touching a horse, in case you're catapulted into a dark timeline that you're now doomed to see through to the bitter end.

These are games in which you're battling against the designer's chosen method of storing your data, rather than dragons or pirates or whatever it is you're supposed to be battling. It's usually dragons, isn't it. Pirate dragons?

The solution

Let's take the nuclear option and abolish save games completely, forcing players to finish every game in one sitting and with one life. Hundred-hour long epics will require you to become a dishevelled husk of a human, deprived of sleep and light, stinking of paprika crisps and rancid bodily fluids, but committed to your task to a degree you never thought possible.

When your character eventually falls into a pit of spikes or is consumed by piranhas, the game is summarily erased from your hard drive and you are finally released from your purgatorial misery, free to walk away from the console, but forever changed by the experience.

Then, and only then, will save games relinquish their sinister control over game design. Honestly, it's for the best. ■

When he's not on the rant, Steve can be found tweeting as [@misterbrilliant](#).

Daniella Lucas is...

The Traveller

Dani gets in touch with nature in **Dragon Age: Inquisition**

Have you ever heard of shinrin-yoku? It's a Japanese practice that roughly translates as 'forest-bathing' – which is essentially going for a nice little walk surrounded by trees in order to improve your health and wellbeing. Basically, the theory is that being surrounded by nature improves your mood and lowers your stress levels which, in turn, improves your health. I love the idea of that, but it's not exactly easy to plan in the time to find an actual forest to go bathing in – the best I can do is a smattering of houseplants and a scented candle, or the collection of three trees at the local dog park. And I'm pretty sure that doesn't count.

To get around this, and in the name of improving my health, I decided to turn to videogames to try to soak up some leafy goodness. At first I thought about trying *Skyrim*, but all that did was make me want to put on an extra jumper, so instead I decided to dive into *Dragon Age: Inquisition* and the Emerald Graves area within. It's a vast forested area near Orlais that's teeming with wildlife and is home to a few grand, decaying estates. Perfect. Maybe I'll even get to spot a few nugs for my troubles while I'm there.

Oh deer

After a bit of a stressful start trying to remember all of the controls and killing a deer, which is probably frowned upon within the forest-bathing community, I manage to pack a few potions in my napsack and head down a dusty trail. The trees here are impressively huge – sunlight barely makes it through the vast canopy, giving a very charming dappled light effect. The ground is covered in an ocean of grass, and I can even see the loping gaits of a few furless nugs in the undergrowth in the distance. I can feel the stress leave my pores as I take a few deep breaths and listen to the music.



"The full-on brawl only ends when I'm done looting their corpses"

This is actually pretty nice, it's a beautifully designed place so you really can appreciate the stillness of nature around you... as long as you stay in a quiet spot. Further along the path I spy some fellow ramblers. One in robes, the



other with some shiny, crystal growths jutting out of his shoulders. When out hiking you're bound to cross paths with others and give each other a polite nod of recognition, but these guys aren't happy to see us. The crystal dude charges and soon my companions Bull and Cassandra charge back. The situation breaks out into a full-on brawl that only ends when I'm done looting their corpses. Not great for the environment, but at least I got a new pair of trousers and my friends have something fresh to quip about.

Wandering free

Okay, back on track. Maybe if I don't wander off too far I can still get back into this whole nature appreciation thing. A little further into the woods I spot a shimmering light. It's beautiful, twisting, dancing, and getting brighter as I approach. It's like a liquid jewel and... oh. Demons are pouring out of it and attacking me. This isn't as relaxing as I hoped it would be. While the Emerald Graves is a beautiful forest, it's still also full of Fade Rifts that pollute the landscape with spirits to fight, and it's not like they're easy battles either. No, you've got waves of them to destroy, each round getting your hackles up and making that vein on your temple bulge a little more until you can finally seal it for good.

The whole demonic rift spoiling your day thing feels a bit like visiting a national park in real life and finding bins overflowing with rubbish every 100 yards. It's not exactly great for ambience. While the Emerald Graves is one of the most beautiful forests in gaming, it sadly hasn't helped me relax by bathing in the tree's health-improving essence, but it has got me in touch with my inner rage demon. I am now at one with the spirit-slaying beast inside me. That's got to count for something, right? ■

You can see more of Dani's gaming travels on Instagram: [@daniellamlucas](#).

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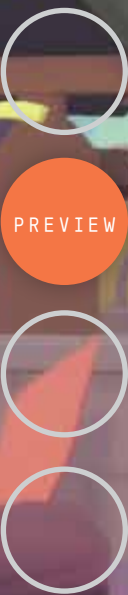
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Preview



The games we want the most

There are 25 Ooblets announced so far, with more on the way

OXM'S MOST WANTED

Steve's pick

Red Dead Redemption II
Another issue means we're another month closer to this Western beauty. Yes, this was my pick last month, and yes, it might be next month's, too.

Dani's pick

Ooblets
I just can't get enough of the monster design – it's like someone is making a game just for me.

Warren's pick

Resident Evil 7: Not A Hero
Free DLC for one of my favourite games this year? Thank you very much Capcom, I'll take it.

It's been a long time coming, but now as the sun sets behind it we can finally see it take form on the horizon. That's right, it's time to saddle up, partners, as we go deep dive on **Red Dead Redemption** (p24) for every morsel we can get our grubby, cowboy-loving hands on. We've turned over every piece of info out there for the ultimate look at what to expect from Rockstar's upcoming Western epic. Clambering back into our metaphorical DeLorean, we go back to Medieval Europe in **Kingdom Come: Deliverance** (p30), which is trying to put a historically accurate spin on the open-world RPG genre. Set in Bohemia, using real locations, you travel the area seeing actual historical events take place during a time of unrest. Seeing how they balance typical game-driven design and accuracy of the period will be incredibly interesting. Elsewhere, things are brightening up with a swell of new adorable **Ooblets** (p32) info, including the reveal of what happens when a jellyfish makes love to a mushroom. Speaking of fungus gone horribly, horribly wrong, it's also time to head back to the home of the Baker family for a slice of DLC in **Resident Evil 7: Not A Hero** (p36). Chris Redfield is back to clean up the mess left behind in the wake of Ethan's misadventures from the main game. But will that Umbrella gear help him with all that Mold?



024



030



032



036

023

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RDR2's first trailer has been viewed a frankly ludicrous 14.8m times on YouTube



Red Dead Redemption 2

Rockstar's best in the West is the sandbox to beat

Dave Meikleham

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR FORMAT XBOX ONE
ETA SPRING 2018



Wyoming, or a quick glimpse at *True Detective* style bayous, *Redemption 2* has a broader world view than John Marston's adventure. The trailer still includes classic Western iconography – rundown one-street towns, old-timey saloons, yawning valleys – but the game's map appears to take as many cues from *GTA V*'s gloriously varied Blaine County as it does the original *Redemption*.

With much of the trailer's action focused on the setting, it's kinda hard to pick out concrete gameplay details. Notable highlights include gunfights with duelling pistols, bank robberies and a nighttime scene involving a stabby takedown (indicating stealth may play a larger role than the last game). Sneaky action also features in one of the trailer's more revealing scenes: a daring train heist.

"The sequel seems to feature a far more varied Wild West world to explore"

Rockstar obviously has previous when it comes to multilayered burglaries – *GTA V* built all of its major missions around the concept of high-end thieving – and there's a chance train robberies could act as a Western take on Franklin, Michael and Trevor's heists. From the little that can be gleaned from the trailer, it seems the sort of pre-mission planning the Los Santos trio often embarked upon may feature. Note how the posse of gang members sneak up on the train using a nearby forest as cover – perhaps you have to do a spot of recon before you go all Grand Theft Choo-choo?

Hunting also appears in the trailer. Glorious, critter-stalking, pelt-skinning hunting. Tracking down creatures played a big part in the first *Redemption* and it looks like

Better look out those spurs, partner: it's time to saddle up with the most exciting sandbox in the world.

Rockstar may only have released two short trailers, but our hopes are already sky-high for the *GTA* studio's latest Old West epic. With a gorgeously varied map, daring train heists and the most advanced face tech we've ever seen from the carbonite cool developer – take a hike, *LA Noire*'s mo-capped gurners – *Red Dead Redemption 2* could well be the most ambitious, impressive open-world Rockstar has ever developed.

Considering the team's last title was the seminal, record-shattering *Grand Theft Auto V* that's quite the claim. Still, even a cursory look at the latest 90-second trailer suggests Rockstar has another cowboy classic on its hands. The new protagonist may seem like a bit of a tool – more on that later – but there's no question this sequel's vast slice of frontier real estate is going to be a hell of a hoot to ride around.

Rockstar has repeatedly said *Redemption 2* takes place in "America's Heartland", an expanse that stretches across some amazingly diverse topography. Where its 2010 predecessor focused almost exclusively on California-esque prairies and a big old chunk of Mexico, the sequel seems to feature a far more varied Wild West world to explore.

Simply the West

Whether it's a scene where riders trek through knee-high snow among the frosty peaks of what could pass for

BOTTOM LEFT
Morgan seems to be tracking down targets who are listed on a ledger.



026



LEFT Come on, that horse'll never fit in that tent.

BELOW Dutch and Morgan may be allies, but there are definite trust issues at play.



An early phone features in the second trailer. The first call in the US took place in 1876

"If there's concern at this stage, it's that Morgan looks like a bit of an outlaw a-hole"

MEET MR MORGAN

There's some speculation Arthur Morgan is played by actor Roger Clark: an American-born actor who learned his trade in the UK. Clark starred in the 1997 mini-series *The Wild West*, so he has previous when it comes to cowboy shenanigans. A quick look at the thespian's IMDb reveals he shares more than a passing resemblance with Morgan. Rockstar casting a relatively obscure character actor for a lead role fits with the studio's past star-shunning practices.

→ the follow-up's animal-assaulting pursuits are even more in-depth. A short clip of a particularly agitated, charging grizzly is accompanied by a brief slice of forest stalking, confirming bows are now part of your arsenal as your crooked cowboy tries to take down a moose.

Outlaw and order

Speaking of which, there's a new, extra-angry gunslinger in town... and it's not the familiar face many were expecting. Before the second trailer hit, many players assumed the game would revolve around a young John Marston, yet now it seems certain you'll be exploring this epic patch of American Frontier as a new outlaw. The latest cinematic primer from Rockstar focuses heavily on one Arthur Morgan: a seemingly cold-blooded criminal who's obsessed with chasing down old debts. The most recent trailer focuses on Morgan's pursuit of people listed on a ledger, and soon this hired gun is threatening folk, harassing bank managers, and having awkward chinwags with a certain Dutch van der Linde.

The appearance of the first *Redemption*'s Big Bad seemingly all but confirms Morgan's soon-to-be sandbox smash is a prequel – after all, Dutch was bumped off in the last game's final act. Marston's doomed quest took part in 1911, using this time period to chronicle the dawning capitalisation of American life while also penning an eloquent goodbye to the Wild West. Considering Dutch looks noticeably younger in *Redemption 2*, the game may well be set around 1900.

John frequently talked about his old leader and former gang mates during his adventure, and it looks like this follow-up chronicles just how Van der Linde went from idealistic Robin Hood figure to disillusioned villain. Of course, knowing Rockstar's love for a sly cameo – remember *GTA III*'s Claude popping up in *San Andreas*, or Packie McReary appearing as an optional heist member in *GTA V*? – don't be

shocked if a young Marston makes a cheeky appearance at some point.

Another returning (super beardy) character also appears in the trailer: Bill Williamson. In the last game, Bill was Marston's main target for the first two-thirds of the adventure, but it appears he's a more comedic presence in the prequel. The scene where he gets stabbed in the hand is played for laughs, so it wouldn't be a surprise if John's old pal is cast as a Roman Bellic-style comedy foil. Just be thankful cell phones didn't exist in 1900, or the bugger would probably phone you up every five minutes begging for a game of Old West darts.

If there's a concern at this stage, it's that Morgan looks like a bit of an outlaw a-hole. Though he only has a couple of meaningful exchanges in the trailer, it already seems like Rockstar's latest sandbox star is a ruthless jerk. In the original *Redemption*, Marston was an essentially decent man weighed down by a dark past. Sure, he could be a bastard at times, but there was a core goodness to the charismatic cowboy that always made you root for him... even when he was filling dudes with lead. As for Morgan? The trailer paints him as a cold, unfeeling bounty hunter with few redeemable qualities – just look at the scene where he threatens a grieving son and his mother. Here's hoping Rockstar can make its latest lead a more sympathetic, three-dimensional character than Morgan's debut trailer suggests.

It's also not yet entirely clear whether you just play as Morgan. The original trailer ended on a closing shot that suggested you may control multiple outlaws, and considering swapping between Trevor and pals in *GTA V* worked so well, perhaps Rockstar will allow you to play as different characters in certain missions. Both the female outlaw – who looks a *lot* like Bonnie MacFarlane from the last game – and the Native American who appear in the trailer seem to be important allies to Morgan. Could *RDR2* let you take control of them at different points?

Regardless of whether the Western open-world focuses solely on Morgan or a magnificently murderous seven, one thing is certain: *Red Dead Redemption 2* is the game to beat in 2018. Buckle up, partners. ■



LEFT Fist fights seem to be on the menu again. We love a Wild West punch-up.





ABOVE The ogres regrow their limbs so take them out quick.

RIGHT You've also got loads of minions to contend with.



Attack On Titan only has one 150ft Titan, whereas this game has loads of them that big



Extinction

Heads will roll in high-speed ogre-slayer **Daniella Lucas**

PUBLISHER MAXIMUM GAMES DEVELOPER IRON GALAXY
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA SPRING 2018



PAST PRESTIGE

The developer Iron Galaxy is usually a contract studio that helps other developers with things like porting games from one platform to another. It has made a few other smaller-scale games itself such as *Wreckateer* and *Divekick*, but *Extinction* is its first truly big game.

If you're looking at this collection of giant ogres and immediately thinking about *Attack On Titan* then you're on the right track on what this game is about. An ancient threat made of 150ft ogres and minions has returned to the land as Ravenii and have promptly started destroying absolutely everything. Being so monstrous you don't really have a way to beat them completely; instead everyone is just in survival mode and you play as a soldier to try and rescue people before it's too late and human civilisation is wiped out completely. You are humanity's last hope.

Watching the trailers, the game looks quite chaotic, what with all of the dashing around and constant monster spawning, but in practice it's actually really easy to get to grips with. All of your basic attacks are mapped to one button with different taps pulling off different moves, so three short taps will chain together a quick series of strikes, while longer presses will give you something a bit flashier and more powerful. Moving around is also a lot faster than in a typical action game so you get a real sense of heroically bounding around the world while you slice up minions and giant ogres. Even after a brief hands-on we were able to start

stringing together some impressive moves, so you'll be able to start to master its nuances fairly quickly.

Big troubles

While fighting giant snot-beasts is the main draw of the game, there's far more to it than that. Each stage is full of civilians that you need to rescue by opening crystal portals to teleport them away before they get attacked. Some are easily found, while others are hidden away on rooftops. They're also scattered quite far apart so you might not be able to rescue all of them – you have to choose who you want to save. While you're doing this the town is also being completely destroyed and there's a marker on the screen tracking how much of the city is left. If it's fully destroyed then it's game over. It forces you into making some horrible decisions – do you try saving people or prioritise the ogre so you'll actually have some town left by the end of it?

You start out quite weak, but there are skills you can get to make things easier. You have a powerful rune strike to help you chop off ogre limbs that triggers a time slow down to help you position your cuts, and you can buy skills that extend that time to make decapitations and the like easier. Of course as you buy more skills, the number and types of ogres you face increases, upping the threat level. While some might have simple wooden armour to destroy, others present puzzles, with some having thorns that you can't climb, or so many locks to destroy that you're better off using a hookshot for a riskier climb.

Our only worry at the moment is that the environment looks quite sparse and bland – the towns feel like basic arenas rather than somewhere civilians might live, and while they have got time to address that before release these spaces need to be open to facilitate its frenetic gameplay. The combat is the real star here, but the world suffers for it both literally, as it's destroyed by ogres, and as a game element, as it lacks any real sense of space. How the team overcome that will be a real challenge, but there's a great action game bubbling away underneath. ■

“You get a real sense of heroically bounding around the world slicing up minions”

The original Kickstarter's stretch goals resulted in new motion capture, new game modes, and, after reaching a million euros, a dog companion



Kingdom Come: Deliverance

Kingdom come, kingdom go, who's the true king, does anyone know? **Griffin Mattis**

PUBLISHER DEEP SILVER, WARHORSE STUDIOS DEVELOPER WARHORSE STUDIOS FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA 13 FEBRUARY 2018



After multiple delays since its initial Kickstarter funding in early 2014, this long-awaited medieval RPG is slated for a February 2018 release. The delays were hardly a surprise. Initially planned as three-act story told in three games, Warhorse Studios condensed the first two acts into *Kingdom Come*. Pressure to release simultaneously on consoles as well as PC meant another delay. Hey, the Holy Roman Empire wasn't built in a day.

The game places you in control of Henry, an apprentice blacksmith in 1403 Bohemia who sees his family slaughtered as a result of military campaigns for the crown. Using period-accurate armour and weaponry, you'll have to strike out on a campaign of your own to gain

vengeance for your family and maintain the rightful king. A medieval quest to restore a king may seem trite, but under director Daniel Vávra, famous for writing and directing *Mafia* and story writing *Mafia II*, there may just be a Holy Grail in this Bohemian malady.

History – boy!

Accuracy is the key point in *KC:D*. Selling itself as a simulation RPG

“As the game grew, a historian was brought on full-time”

instead of one based in fantasy means that every detail is pulled from the history books, from the architecture of the castles to the real-life swords offered as rewards for Kickstarter backers. The studio initially expected just a few consultations with historians to ensure accuracy – as the game grew, it brought on a historian full-time to maintain the historical nature.

This accuracy means that combat is more comparable to *For Honor* than *Skyrim*, with directional inputs controlling each weapon swing and shield block. It also means that blows to an unhelmeted head can turn a dome to done in a split second, and a starved Henry will have less stamina to defend himself.

Instead of a strict class system, there are three types of skills you can invest in: thief, knight, or bard. These skills are refined through practise, so it seems like not everyone will devolve to a stealthy archer.

Reality does take an occasional backseat to gameplay, although the two never seem too far apart. In-game alchemy offers up more than turning lead into gold – using everything from dandelions to wormwood, you can brew potions to steady an archer's hands as well as poisons to slip into enemy meals. Of course, crafting these elixirs requires adding and simmering each individual ingredient according to whatever recipe you're following.

Optimism comes much easier than a combat victory or vitality potion – *KC:D* took home Best PC Game at Gamescom 2017. Come February, we'll see if this Bohemian behemoth can truly deliver. ■

ABOVE Henry must survive sieges from both inside and outside the castle walls.

BELOW Combat promises a realistic level of brutality and efficiency. You're a warrior here, not the chosen one.



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PREVIEW

There are currently 22 different crops in the game to grow



Ooblets

This beautiful indie farm sim still has us seeing Durbles

Louise Blain

PUBLISHER DOUBLE FINE PRESENT DEVELOPER GLUMBERLAND
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA 2018



SHOP AROUND

Not that there isn't plenty of other things to do but Cordingley and Wasser have added a shopkeeping ability for you to while away the day in retail heaven with your Ooblets. The other shops in the game will all have set opening hours and an NPC schedule means the world will change around you every day.

Why is *Ooblets* so compelling? Why do we all just stop what we're doing to gaze adoringly at this farm-life sim as a girl saunters happily along with tiny creatures bouncing behind her? Well, we could either put our cute-compelled psyches on the therapist's couch to find out the exact reason, or just take a look at some of the new features announced by the tiny team at Glumberland. Rebecca Cordingley and her partner Ben Wasser are still hard at work on development but *Ooblets* is shaping up cuter and more compulsively in-depth than ever.

While of course you can battle your Ooblets, join clubhouses and even go on fetch adventures in the newly implemented quest system, the team has been equally attentive to the home comforts of you and your tiny beings. Not only will your house grow with you for you to fill with furniture, rugs and even windows, as you progress through the game, there's also the ability to store your Ooblets in their own miniature abodes. Oopcoops are where we'll keep the critters who make our follow party a little too busy and gives them their very own mansion to swan around in. Don't worry about leaving them behind, the treelike Lumpstump is probably happy

to have somewhere to finally store his Ikea furniture.

The team has also been showing off the new machines you can build for your farm. While there are sprinklers, complete with a handy area of effect indicator while you're placing it – yes, we're looking at you *Stardew Valley* – there are also carpentry machines for crafting fences and wooden paths, and even a cupcake press for when nothing but cake will do. Each of these machines requires you to own the recipe of the product and the right ingredients, so no Nanoberry cupcakes for you unless you can cough up the Nanoberreries. No, not literally, you monster.

Quest for glory

Also newly added is the ability to send your Ooblets out on quests. Head to see Gernard and they'll journey to far off lands without you – sob – on their own mini, presumably adorable, adventures. Each Ooblet quest has its own difficulty and chance of success but don't worry, even if they don't reign victorious, they'll still come back to you for levelling up and trying again.

Aaand of course even more Ooblets have arrived, each more ridiculously squee-inducing than the last. Gullyspot is a mushroom crossed with a jellyfish, while Bristlebud is adorably spiky, and Durbles just looks like an upside down flower with icing on top. Some Ooblets are also exclusive to certain regions so you'll have to head out on foot or in a handy hot air balloon to travel to new areas and catch them all. The pair has revealed a dark, creepy area known as Nullwhere with glowing plantlife and two brand new Ooblets called Glanter and Snurfler, so you'll have to be brave.

Plus, in case you were wondering just how things could get even more addictive, the team has revealed a Research Facility where you'll be able to take one of each Ooblet and plant. Not only will this fill a gap in a potentially terrifyingly huge list but the lab will even hand over some cash for your trouble. All in all, *Ooblets* is shaping up better than ever and we can't wait for that teasing 2018 window to magically transform into a solid release date (probably wearing a monocle). ■

“There's now the ability to store Ooblets in their own miniature abodes”





033



ABOVE With titles like Gloopylonglegs and Rad Lad, you'll never need to spend any time thinking of new names.

FAR LEFT There'll be no need to water crops every day once you've set up perfect rows of automated sprinklers.

LEFT While you could explore on foot, you can reach all-new regions quickly by hopping into a hot air balloon.

PREVIEW

The 5678's band who appeared in *Kill Bill* have recorded a few tracks for the game



Steel Rats

Motorbike stunts get a whole lot more deadly

Daniella Lucas

PUBLISHER TATE MULTIMEDIA DEVELOPER TATE MULTIMEDIA
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA SUMMER 2018



BACK TO THE FUTURE

The whole game has got a rockabilly, 1950s, Americana vibe to it, with a dark robotic twist, but it's great charging around and seeing loads of period-appropriate art adorning the walls. It lends a great sense of place to the game.

Ever felt like *Trials Fusion* had something missing from its stunt racing formula? That it needed something a little more... deadly? Well, that's exactly what this indie project aims to do, giving motorbike riding a combat twist thanks to a robot invasion that needs taking care of, and only your biker gang has what it takes to deal with it.

The big draw here is the fact that the front wheel on your bike is also a saw blade that you can use to slice up enemies, destroy scenery and even to grip into and climb walls so you can ride your hog on the rooftops if you choose. It's a simple spin (see what we did there?) that transforms an already solid idea into something else entirely. In our hands-on session, it felt like a welcome breath of fresh air for the genre. As well as your sawblade you'll also have several guns to give you a ranged attack. Aiming them is a little tricky when you're on the move, but it helps give you loads of extra options in a fight.

You can control one of four different characters, each with their own weapon specialisations – such as a mid-range accurate machine gun, or less accurate but more destructive grenades. What you go

up against will determine who you pick, and you can change mid-level if you ever get stuck. They also work a bit like a lives system – if one character dies you just pick another one to play as instead for the rest of the level. This does limit you to just four lives per attempt though, and if you accidentally die as the most useful hero for an enemy type then you're in for a rough ride. As well as guns to use against more long-range enemies, you've also got a parrying move that sees your bike do a spin and deflect attacks with its saw blade if you time things correctly.

Move over

It plays out a bit like a side-scroller – you travel from left to right – but with a lot more freedom. You can weave back on yourself and each stage has more than one 'lane' to move between. So you might start out at the front of the screen but an obstacle comes up in front of you, or you want to weave around an enemy – you can then push up to switch into the lane behind to avoid any collisions or choose a different path. These two lanes make movement far more flexible, but you still need to make sure you correctly land after jumps so that you don't fall off your bike, and that you're gripping to a wall on your way down from a big drop, otherwise you'll lose a life.

Each level has alternate paths for you to choose from and hidden secrets for you to discover behind breakable scenery. You've got set objectives to complete on each level – or if you really wanted to you could race right to the end past it all for a quick finish, but where's the fun in that? You can also find set-pieces – in the level we played you could either fire normally at a machine while it continued to spawn enemies, or blow up a blockage on a tram line, sending the carriage flying into the machine and destroying it for you.

There's still a while to go until *Steel Rats* will wheelie its way onto Xbox One, but so far it looks like it's shaping up to be a fun little distraction that will keep you entertained for hours thanks to an impressive amount of freedom added to what is usually a very straightforward genre. ■

"The front wheel is also a saw blade that you can use to slice up enemies"





035



ABOVE There are several robot types, but these small ones are the ones you'll face most often.

FAR LEFT The whole game has a deliciously moody colour palette.

Chris Redfield first appeared in the original *Resident Evil*



Resident Evil 7: Not A Hero

Moldy horror is continuing to grow on us...

Daniella Lucas

PUBLISHER CAPCOM DEVELOPER CAPCOM
FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA 12 DECEMBER



Chris Redfield finally returns in this follow-up to this year's best horror game. It may just be some DLC, but the free Not A Hero update picks up where things left off at the Baker household and sees *Resident Evil* icon Chris fight his way back into the house to clean up and deal with Lucas Baker.

It promises to be a lot more action-based than Ethan's adventures in the main game, with Chris having a whole load of weaponry from Umbrella to help him deal with the Molded. But villain Lucas seems even crazier and harder to deal with than usual, having taken over an old mine and turned it into his own private laboratory. At one point you even see a giant, tunnel-

eating machine working its way towards you.

It all kicks off a few minutes after the end of the main game, with Eveline defeated. The helicopter has swooped in to rescue Ethan after his horrible ordeal, and now Blue Umbrella is trying to establish control over the situation before it spreads further and the Mold escapes out into the wild.

"It promises to be a lot more action-based than the main game"



The original threat of Eveline's fungus-producing mind-control abilities may have passed, but Lucas Baker is still very much at large, having used a serum to resist her brainwashing in pursuit of his own agenda.

Break the Mold

You're definitely not welcome here and Lucas seems to very much be playing a game with you, baiting you into his traps for his own amusement. You'll have to shoot your way through loads of Molded and puzzles to finally put this issue to rest. The mine itself looks absolutely huge so while this is a piece of DLC it still looks like there will be tons here to explore and fill in the blanks of the Baker family's story.

It promises to be a really hefty chunk of DLC and all the better for being free, but that's not all that *Resi* fans have got to look forward to. We'll also be finding out what happened to Zoe in a separate piece of paid DLC. Though, to be fair, it doesn't look great as she's been completely calcified by Eveline's powers, essentially becoming a human statue.

End Of Zoe also introduces a new character called Joe who calls himself her family despite being a stranger to the game. Maybe this won't be a straightforward clean-up for Chris and his Umbrella friends after all. ■



ABOVE Be prepared to be taunted the whole way through.

BELOW Your Umbrella colleagues aren't quite as up to the task as you are.

Jurassic World is the second all-conquering licence Frontier has worked on, after games based on *Wallace and Gromit*



Jurassic World Evolution

Early signs point to this one being dino-mite

Ian Dransfield

PUBLISHER FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS DEVELOPER FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS FORMAT XBOX ONE ETA SUMMER 2018



Don't run away! You've seen the fact this is a film tie-in and you're rightly worried, if not scared. But don't be – *Jurassic World Evolution* is being made by UK developer Frontier, the same studio behind *Elite Dangerous* and *Screamride* on Xbox One, as well as *Planet Coaster* and – a while ago – *Rollercoaster Tycoon*.

Why does this matter? Well first up, it means Frontier knows its way around making games for console, something that can be a tricky business if you're not used to making things for a pad. Second of all, it means this is a studio that has not

only made park management games in the past – it's made some superb park management games in the past.

Thrown on top of all this is the *Jurassic World* licence and a case of thoroughly obvious (but still brilliant) idea-having. What's the best thing about the *Jurassic* franchise? Coming up with ideas of how you'd do it all better, of course. You wouldn't hire Dennis Nedry, you wouldn't bioengineer the most dangerous dinosaur of all time, and you absolutely wouldn't install regular, raptor-grabbable doorhandles throughout your important security facilities. Thanks to *Jurassic World Evolution* you'll be able to live out these fantasies of getting it right where John Hammond got it all so very wrong.

Find a way

While the behind the scenes setup is handled by the management sim veterans of Frontier, it's you

"You'll be able to live out fantasies of getting it right"

the player who has to create and run a successful park. Controlling operations on Isla Nublar and its surrounding, dino-saturated islands, the game sees you not just building and running a park, but researching new tech, bioengineering new breeds of dinosaur (just remember to make them less dangerous) and figuring out how to keep everything running safely by factoring in security.

Is it an inevitability that things will go wrong and the dinosaurs will escape? We want to say no, because that would be the obvious route to go and there's a real desire in many of our hearts to make a *successful* Jurassic park. All the same, there's always room for a bit of a disaster, and *Jurassic World Evolution* will surely let us try out our best and brightest plans for fixing the rather pressing issue of 'a load of ten-ton animals getting loose'.

Jurassic World Evolution looks the part, and while there's only limited information out there so far, Frontier's pedigree speaks for itself. This game has serious potential. The only major issue we've noticed so far is a distinct lack of Ian Malcolm, and so, a lack of Jeff Goldblum. Honestly, we'd be happy to pay an extra bit of cash to get him later as DLC. Life finds a way, after all. ■

ABOVE When night is falling and raptors are looking this crafty, it's time to worry.

roundup



WE PRAISE THE GODS OF GAMES YET TO PASS FOR SPACE MARINES, OLYMPIC GOLD AND A WHOLE BUNCH OF FULLY LICENSED CRICKET TEAMS **DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN**

OUTCAST: SECOND CONTACT



PUBLISHER BIGBEN INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER APPEAL **DUE** 24 NOVEMBER

Released in 1999, the original *Outcast* was one of the first proper 3D open-worlds on PC, and now it's coming to Xbox One with a modern remake overseen by the original developers. In the shoes of Cutter Slade (a name that was, presumably, taken straight from the book of generic male protagonist baby names), explore an alien world with third-person shooting and quests aplenty.

REALMS OF ARKANIAN: BLADE OF DESTINY



PUBLISHER UIG ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER CRAFTY STUDIOS **DUE** 31 DECEMBER

Turn-based RPG classic *Realms Of Arkania: Blades Of Destiny* – which first hit PCs in 1992 – is coming to Xbox One, making it the first time the German fantasy romp has ever appeared on consoles. Explore the fantasy setting of Thorwal with a complete modern overhaul of the original combat system and art style, and up to 80 hours of gameplay promised. Best clear your schedule.

FAR CRY 5



PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DEVELOPER UBISOFT **DUE** 27 FEBRUARY 2018

Plenty of news on the *Far Cry* front this month. Not only will *Far Cry 5* be the first game in the series to get a version localised in Arabic, but the US version is getting a \$200 special edition. The Resistance Edition includes a Hope County bandana and pin, a 'premium' statue, postcards, and something called a 'beer koozie', whatever that might be.

STEEP: ROAD TO THE OLYMPICS



PUBLISHER UBISOFT
DEVELOPER UBISOFT ANNECY **DUE** 5 DECEMBER

A year on from its original release, *Steep's* fully licensed foray into pro snowsports will arrive just in time for Christmas with a new Road To The Olympics mode, featuring real-life athletes such as snowboarder Sage Kotsenburg and alpine ski racer Lindsey Vonn. With the 2018 Winter Olympics set to kick off in February in South Korea, it's time to hit the virtual slopes again.

ASHES CRICKET



PUBLISHER KOCH MEDIA
DEVELOPER BIG ANT STUDIOS **DUE** 16 NOVEMBER

Time to break out the wickets and start practising your 'ooooowzat!' calls, because Xbox One is getting another cricket simulator in the form of *Ashes Cricket*. From the same Aussie studio that brought you the well-regarded *Don Bradman Cricket* series, this latest bat 'n' ball sim will be fully licensed for the first time and will feature both male and female pros.

SPACE HULK DEATHWING ENHANCED EDITION



PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER STREUM ON STUDIO/CYANIDE
DUE 5 DECEMBER

This shooter-cum-horror is preparing to hit Xbox One and it's bringing with it more guns and modes than you could shake a *Warhammer 40K* miniature at. As a Space Marine Terminator, you'll basically be re-enacting the plot of *Aliens*, only with bigger guns, procedurally generated missions and buckets of goth style.

→ FOR MORE PREVIEWS AND THE LATEST GAMES CHECK OUT GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM



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BREAKING NEW GROUND

WHY THE XBOX AND XBOX ONE X VERSIONS OF THE PHENOMENON KNOWN
AS **PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS** WILL BE THE DEFINITIVE ONES

PHIL IWANIUK

PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

In October 2017, almost 2.4 million people played *PUBG* at the same time



Thirteen. Million. Copies. Before *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* even reaches version 1.0 or launches on consoles, it's already found an audience bigger than the total population of London. Which is apt, because both groups are equally likely to become hostile upon making eye contact. It regularly draws 2 million concurrent players each day on PC, and it's even outpacing *Minecraft*, the planet's current best-selling game of all time, to big sales milestones. Notch & co took about 1,500 days after launch to hit ten million copies sold. PlayerUnknown and his team at Bluehole needed only 150.

So the prospect of *PUBG*'s release on Xbox platforms this winter isn't just about beating strangers unconscious with frying pans, Dacia joyrides, or the chance to assess what all the fuss was about. This is a cultural phenomenon that can – and will – change the landscape of Xbox gaming. Luckily **OXM** is in a fine position to get an early taste of what that seismic shift will be like, for two reasons. One: we spoke to three of the team behind the game, including Brendan Greene (aka PlayerUnknown), to better understand the studio's intentions for an Xbox version. Two: the game's already out in the wild on PC, and we have both an Xbox pad and a spare USB port. In other words, a DIY approximation of what *PUBG* might be like to play on Xbox.

BREEDING GROUND

First, though, a history lesson. Once upon a time great games just fell from the sky having followed a fairly plottable trajectory. *Halo*, for example, was created by Bungie and developed specifically for the original Xbox's launch. *Call Of Duty* was the result of some *Medal Of Honor* veterans getting together and forming a new studio. But in these modern times, the big games always seem to have far more complicated origin stories, and *PUBG* is a prime example. Essentially it's a mod... for a mod. When New Zealand soldier Dean Hall created a survival-focused game mode for *Arma 2* in 2012, he set in motion the chain of events that would birth *PUBG*. *DayZ*'s popularity gave other amateur modders a platform to create their own spinoff content for a huge audience, and Brendan 'PlayerUnknown' Greene was one of them. Living on welfare at the time in his home town of Kildare, Ireland, Greene used *DayZ* as the basis for an ambitious multiplayer experience that aimed to turn 2000 movie *Battle Royale* into a competitive shooter. It was a very, very good idea.



PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

It's possible to reach Spawn Island in the north-east of the map during a match



044

BELOW This is what you want. Scoped rifle, level 3 helmet and body armour? Unstoppable!



The narrative elements from *Battle Royale* aren't held in sharp focus at any point of the *PUBG* experience. You're never told what dark turn humanity must have taken for the hunting of fellow-humans to become commonplace. But the mechanics of Kinji Fukasaku's film are all present and correct: island full of weapons, ever-diminishing safe zone, one winner, many corpses.

Those mechanics form an experience that, as Changho Lee tells us, raise the intensity to unprecedented levels in multiplayer gaming. "Even when you're just hiding and not engaging in combat," he says, "your heart is beating so fast. And when you kill someone, or get killed, the emotional roller coaster ride that you're pushed into is just crazy." A prevailing kill-or-be-killed mentality isn't anything new in multiplayer gaming of course, but Changho says "the intensity of the emotions you go through isn't as dramatic as in our game."

It's not just a nice marketing line. *PUBG* really does have the capacity to thrill at any moment, whether you're laying prone in a bush, breaching a door, or looking down your scope at an actual human being – a relatively rare sight, for a game about shooting people. It's able to maintain this tension even in periods of downtime, when you might be looting, travelling, or just waiting out the clock, because you know that somewhere else on the map, someone's getting killed. And that makes your continued survival more meaningful by the second. The details have changed over time, as you'd expect from an Early Access game: the guns, the vehicles, the textures. But the central idea was in place right from Greene's very first iteration of *PUBG*, conceived in sleepy Kildare.

BIG BUSINESS

The name might bear only his name, but PlayerUnknown himself now has the help of

OXM
SAYS



Stephen Ashby

Few games manage the same level of tension as *PUBG* when you're one of the last players alive and the circle is closing in. It's clear why so many people love it, and I've no doubt that it will be hugely popular on Xbox One.



Daniela Lucas

I'm looking forward to the ease of playing this on console with a controller in hand. You can't beat playing a FPS from the comfort of your sofa with a pile of snacks rather than sat stiffly at a desk with a mouse and keyboard.



Warren Brown

My PC falls well short of coping with *PUBG*; it still rocks a floppy drive! So having the opportunity to play mates on Xbox Live suits me fine. Steve's been prepping by watching let's play vids but I'm still going to whoop his ass! Fact!

LEFT The ghillie suit is rare, but makes hiding in grass easier.

RIGHT Improved water effects mean that you can wade more realistically.

OUT OF THE BLUEHOLE

Changho Lee shares his future vision with us, and explains why the Xbox One X will be a game-changer

What are your plans for future updates?

I'd like to see killcams and 3D and 2D replays in our game, because [with them] you'd be able to understand why you died, and also find out whether the opponent was using hacks or not. You could also watch footage of other skilled players and learn how to use their skills.

What impact will Xbox One X have on games as a whole?

4K and HDR were introduced to Xbox One X. People were informed about that and I think if games can be developed to support that, that'll be great for players. And that would affect the TV electronics industry as well, because they will need to get devices or TVs that support that and I think that's in the end great news for gamers because higher resolution means it can give you more immersion.



BELOW The new desert map will come to Xbox One at some point, but sadly it won't be available when the game launches on 12 December.

"When you kill someone, or get killed, the emotional roller coaster ride is just crazy"

an entire team of developers at Korea-based Bluehole Interactive, headed by Changho Lee. Another studio in Spain, Anticito, is assisting with console development, and Microsoft itself is involved in developing Xbox and Xbox One versions. The rate of growth has been explosive, Changho explains, and growing at that speed has its own demands. "We had about 30 people in the team when we first released the Early Access version, and now we have over 100 people. It took me some time to hire and interview all those people to grow the team to that size." The game's popularity has also attracted keen interest from esports organisers and "different entities" looking to work with the developers in some capacity. "Sometimes they can be very demanding, so I try to not have those things affect the development of the main game. But things have been a little bit crazier than expected."

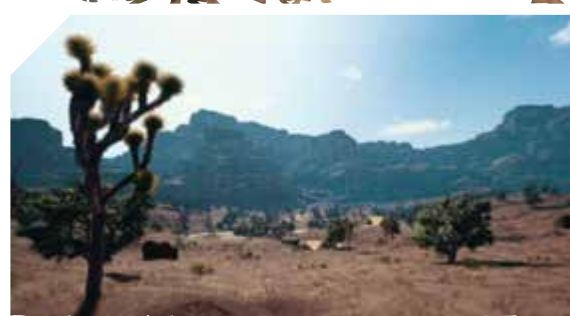
One of the crazier moments in the short timespan of *PUBG*'s success was its prominent appearance in E3 2017's Xbox conference. It was a big scalp for

Microsoft to secure planet Earth's biggest game exclusively for its own consoles, and amidst the cheering Los Angeles crowds, a moment for Changho to reflect on the game's success. "I didn't know we were going to E3 until like a month before the event. I think we were second or third onstage. It was something I didn't expect, like: 'Oh wow, maybe we are successful!'"

That level of success – and exposure – places high demands on the Xbox and Xbox One X versions of *PUBG*. Not only does Bluehole have to successfully translate the winning formula that's so far been developed and updated with only a mouse-and-keyboard audience in mind to a gamepad, it also needs to capitalise on the One X's higher performance ceiling and demonstrate what the new console is capable of.

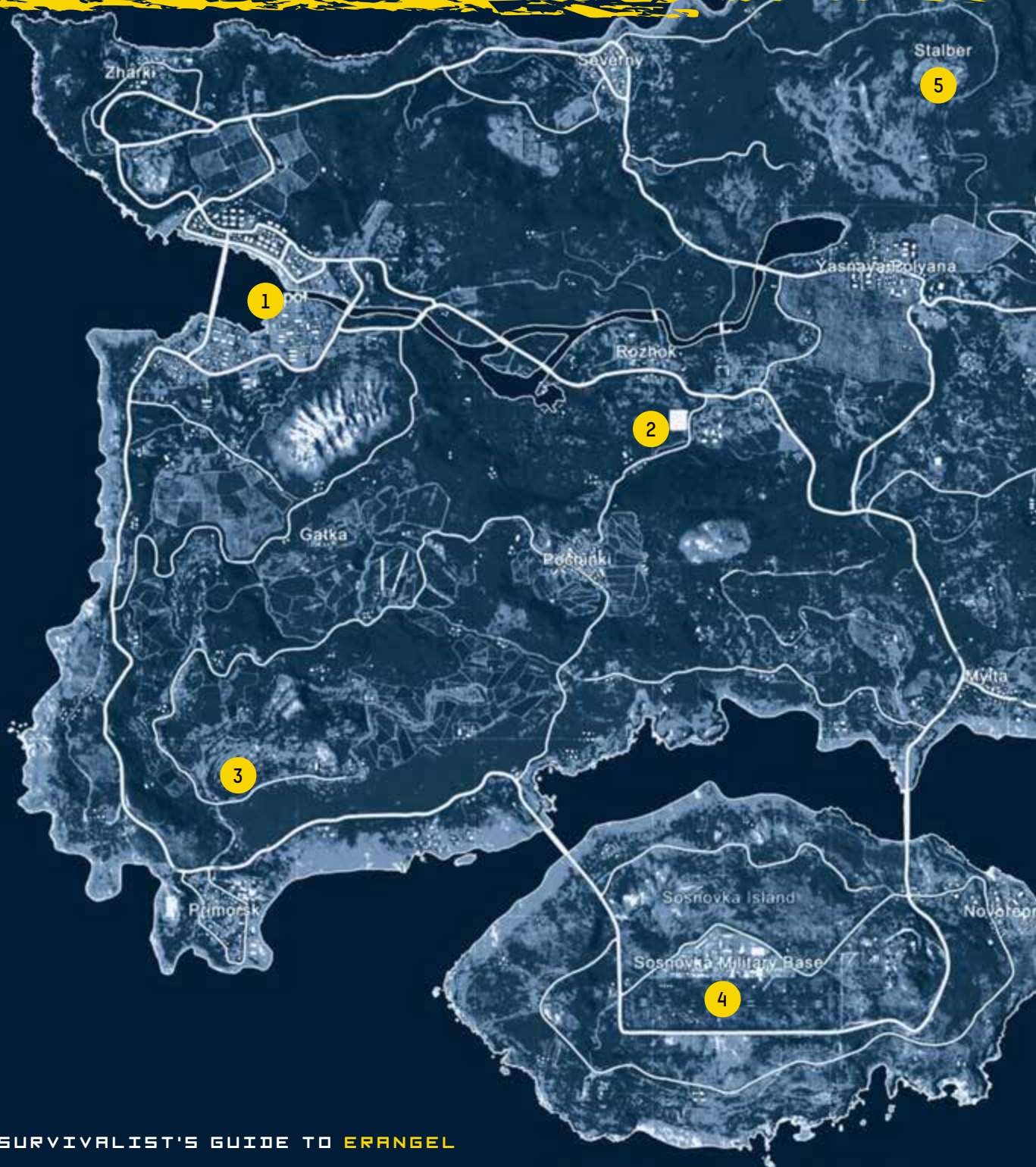
X FACTOR

Front and centre for the One X are 4K support at high resolution, and HDR. Taking the journey from PC to console usually means compromising some of the overall visual



045

PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS



↓ A SURVIVALIST'S GUIDE TO ERANGEL



1 GEORGOPOL

Erangel's largest town, but somewhat lacking in modern facilities. The accommodation consists primarily of derelict apartments, for example.



2 SCHOOL

A central location with a high chance of great loot spawning, which is to say it's fairly popular. Expect an immediate fight if you drop here at the start of a match.



3 QUARRY

This southwesterly location has a decent chance of spawning rare loot, and lots of isolated buildings. A great spot if the safe zone falls this way.



4 SOSNOVA MILITARY BASE

Perhaps the riskiest drop point on the map. Full of rare weapons and armour, but isolated on the southern island and inevitably full of people.



5 STALBER

A great big mountain with very little loot at the top. Come here for a quiet drop, but expect to have to journey far to make it into the next safe zone.

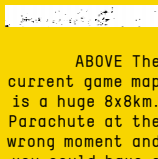


PUBG



6 MYTA POWER

As one would expect, it's a power station. Therefore it's littered with shotguns, body armour, bandages and sniper scopes. You know - power station stuff.



ABOVE The current game map is a huge 8x8km. Parachute at the wrong moment and you could have a long run to get into the white safe zone.



RIGHT Getting a car can save your life... or end it.

BELOW That church looks like a handy sniping tower...



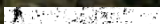
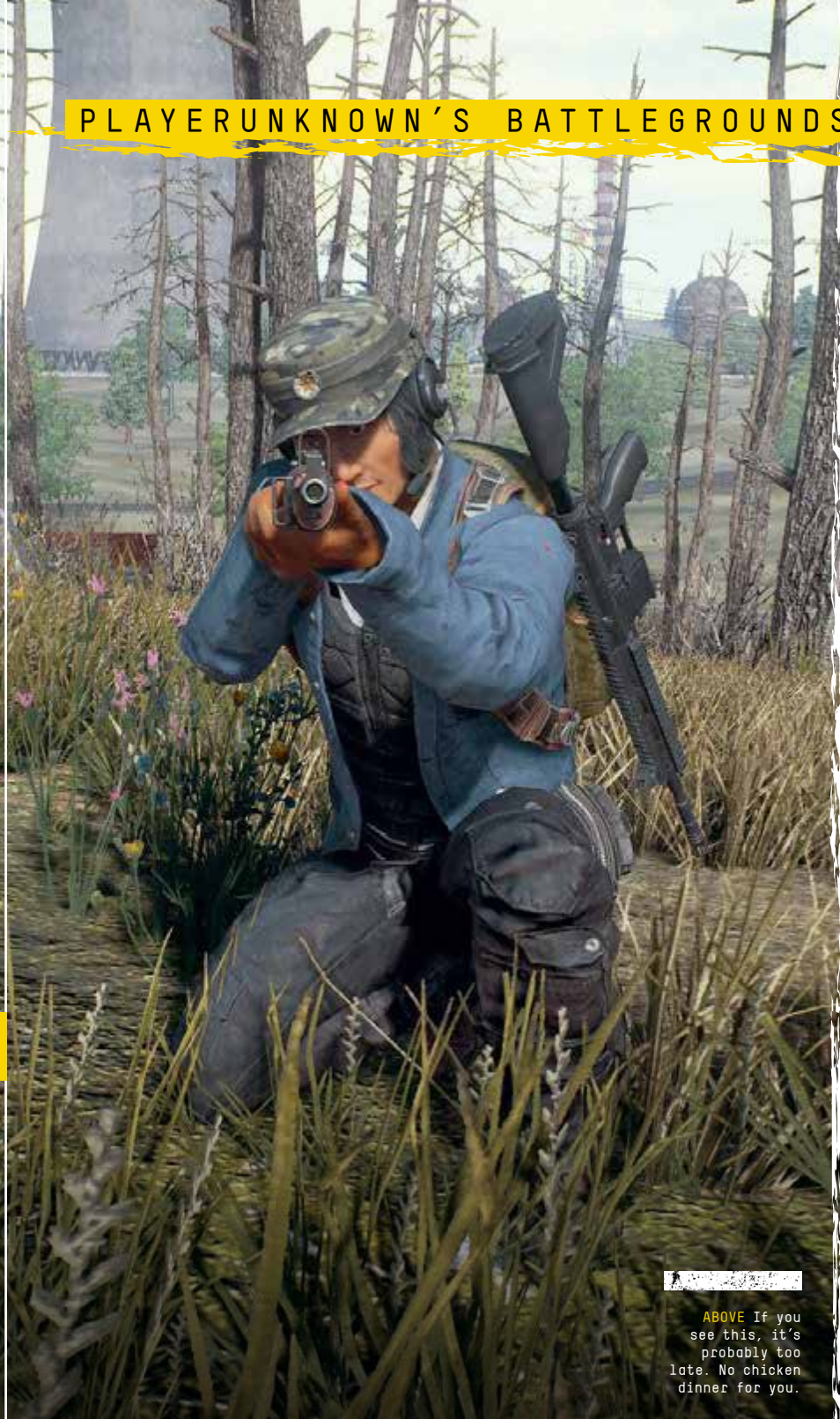
"For major updates in the long-term we'd update it as much as we do on PC"

fidelity in the name of acceptable frame rates (usually locked), but in this case that compromise need not be made. "Xbox One X definitely has higher specs," says Changho, "so FPS would be higher." 4K and HDR are "really important to Xbox One X", he continues, confirming their support on *PUBG*'s Xbox One X version.

Broadly, Bluehole's philosophy is about parity between PC and Xbox, not showering additional features on the latter. After all, 2 million players every day seem quite content with the product as it is. But one particular challenge lies before any developer who wants to roll out regular content updates: the dreaded store approval. Microsoft has the final say over what appears on its store, and meeting the required criteria for approval can present additional workload for devs previously used to working in a PC environment

without such a barrier. With that said, Changho tells us he doesn't anticipate much difference between release schedules for the Xbox and PC versions once they're released. "[In the] short-term there's an evaluation process on Xbox so it might take longer than it takes on PC", he says. "But for major updates in the long-term we'd update it as much as we do on PC."

One area where that parity between platforms comes to a particularly tricky head is in cross-platform play. Very few games have truly achieved an enjoyable and fair environment for players from PC and consoles to come together and shoot at each other, and while *Forza Horizon 3* had it relatively easy in that its PC players probably have pads in their hands too, *PUBG* needs to allow pad players to compete with ultra-competitive mouse-aim users. While cross-platform play is something Changho



ABOVE If you see this, it's probably too late. No chicken dinner for you.

→ says Bluehole "really wants to do", he's unwilling to provide a definitive roadmap for its implementation.

CONTROL FREAK

In order to fully understand the magnitude of that technical challenge, we went native in *PUBG* using our trusty Xbox One Elite pad. Despite over 50 hours on the clock in the PC version, it had always been a strictly mouse-and-keyboard affair until this point, and it wouldn't be altogether surprising to learn we were the first people among the many millions of players who'd ever attempted such an unorthodox control scheme. Goodbye decent stats, hello right trigger.

What's striking about playing *PUBG* with a pad is that even though the basic movement and aiming feels well-tuned already, there's so much subtlety to the full PC control set that's hard to translate. For example, strafing using the left stick automatically slows the player's movement speed to a walk in order to steady your aim, but the lean controls that add an extra layer of precision on keyboard are kept at arm's length by a fiddly 'hold aim and press X' binding. Tasks that at first seem like they'd also be fiddly like placing map markers are already handled well by the pad control set (just hover over an area and press the right stick in with the map open), but it's by no means the stuff of muscle memory when we jump out of the plane and into our first pad-only *PUBG* round.



PUBG'S DEATH-DEALING ARSENAL, DETAILED



DPS	RATE	RANGE	MAG
48	0.100	400	30

AKM ASSAULT RIFLE

Highly desirable rifle based on the ol' classic AK47. Great power and decent range, with an auto fire mode and plenty of slots for mods. Fit a 4x scope to it and you're laughing, but it's also handy at short range.



DPS	RATE	RANGE	MAG
132	1.850	1000	5

AWM SNIPER RIFLE

The god rifle. A massively powerful long-range bangstick with an admittedly slow fire rate, but fit it with a 4x scope or higher, wait on high ground, and you're the most dangerous person on the map.



DPS	RATE	RANGE	MAG
25	0.200	25	2

S686 SHOTGUN

A very common shotgun that's easy to dismiss as next-to-useless thanks to a slow reload rate. If you don't have anything better around though, two hits at close range from one of these will solve your problems quickly.



DPS	RATE	RANGE	MAG
35	0.92	300	30

UMP9 SUB-MACHINE GUN

A reasonably common sub-machine gun that you'll find plenty of ammo lying around for, and which can house plenty of mods. It lacks long range, but at close to medium quarters the UMP9 holds its own.



DPS	RATE	RANGE	MAG
80	0.500	1	N/A

FRYING PAN MELEE

It's a frying pan. And, yes, it'll lose in a firefight against an AKM every time. But this thing can save your life: its melee damage is huge, and it actually works as a bullet-proof shield when it's on your back.



ABOVE Fire can be a surprisingly useful tool, especially for getting people out of cover and into the fight.

→ We begin with a trial by fire strategy intended to test out the aiming and shooting as quickly as possible, heading straight for the prison. Always a popular drop point, its many buildings house a good deal of powerful weapons, bullet vests and helmets. Barely managing to pick up a stun grenade and get a pair of trousers on in a warehouse, we immediately make contact with another player. Just as they see us, we pick up an S12K shotgun and some rounds, but it's to no avail: by the time we get a bead on them, they're already shooting us. Round one is over for us in one loud bang.

Second try: a more calculated approach. Dropping out of the plane (using A, despite an onscreen prompt to use X) at a more secluded location, we take our time to accumulate some decent gear from a few isolated farmhouses. The inherent strangeness of controlling everything with a pad does begin to wear off after a couple of minutes, and in most aspects the bindings work well, but aiming simply isn't as quick as when using a mouse. How could it be? It makes us nervous.

And well it should. Leaving the last farmhouse for the next zone, we decide to pass through a relatively open area in the prone stance (B button) to minimise visibility. It's in that relatively open area that another player sees us, casually walks within a foot of us and executes us with his pistol before we can even get off the floor. Maybe we'd still have died with a mouse in our hand, but we'd probably have done so with more dignity.

SNEAKING IN

Third try: we basically drop to the most remote location we can find, scabble together a coat and a pistol, and spend 20 minutes running away from people. It works extraordinarily well. Without a single decent

piece of loot to our name, we're already in the last 30 players on the map. Time to be a bit more considered. Knowing that we probably can't beat PC players in a gunfight, our strategy is to simply make our way to the middle of each zone as it appears, keep our head down, and stay out of trouble. There's gunfire over every horizon, but somehow we avoid any company and crawl into the top ten. The tension mounts. Ten of us, all hunkered down on a grassy hill outside the southern island's military base. All of them probably better equipped than us, and almost certainly not gripping a gamepad. Twice we spot enemies behind trees, but think better of opening fire on them with our puny pistol. Our best chance of winning is to remain undetected in this shrub we're crouching in until it's a 1v1 scenario. And even then, we'll need some considerable luck. Sadly as we watch the screen fade to grey and the camera zoom out on our lifeless body, we realise luck already deserted us in an instant. Someone, unsighted, popped off a round straight into our head before we had a chance to move. Never mind, though: 4th overall isn't bad – especially with a pad.

The cold, hard truth is that console players will need considerable aim assist to compete on battlefields like this. Obviously the pad controls on PC aren't an accurate reflection of the Xbox versions' final feel, but even with this surprisingly stable foundation to build upon and all the will in the world, Bluehole can't make controller aiming as fast as using a mouse without some assistance. Whether Bluehole will find the right level of assists and tweaks remains to be seen, likewise how the PC community would react to playing against assisted opponents. What is clear even at this point though is that *PUBG* is going to take Xbox by storm. It's simply carrying too much momentum behind it not to. ■

↓ TOP 5 PUBG TIPS

HOW TO MAKE THE TOP TEN EVERY ROUND

DROP SOMEWHERE SMART

Everyone knows where the most powerful loot is – this is the world's most popular game, after all. So rather than heading right for it, pick a quiet drop location.

DON'T GET GREEDY

Look for a good primary weapon with two clips of ammo, a bullet vest, a helmet, and some form of health regeneration. Got those? Don't keep running into new and dangerous buildings, then.

STAY AWARE

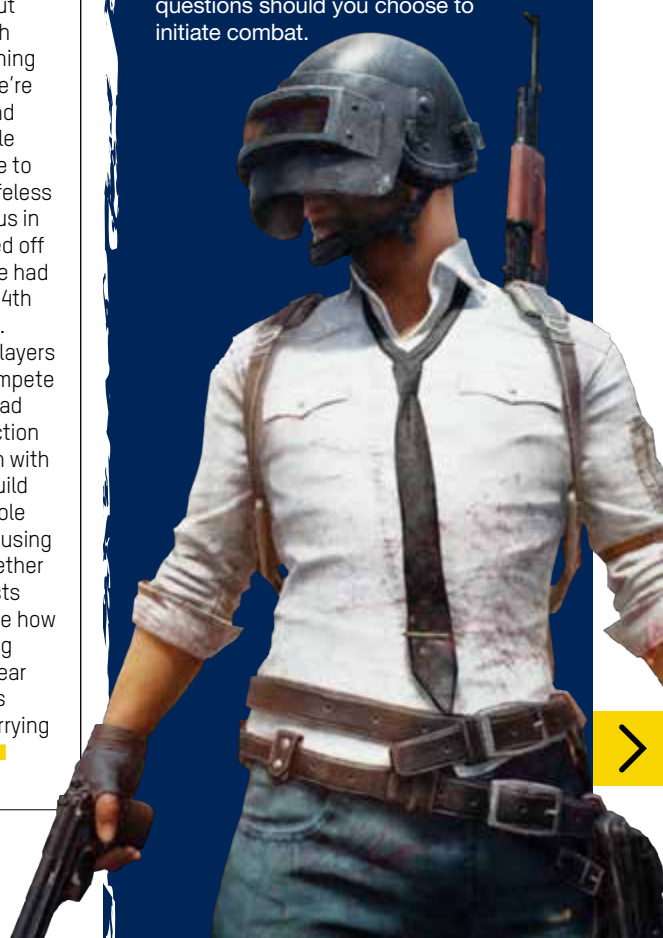
99% of your deaths will come as the result of someone seeing you before you saw them. Keep that in mind whenever you have to change location. Stay quiet and hidden.

GET CENTRAL

If you're in the middle of the *next* zone early, you're at a big advantage. Most players will be rushing to make it inside in the dying seconds, and you'll be waiting for them.

DON'T SHOOT UNTIL YOU'RE SURE

So you've seen someone. Are you close enough to take a shot? Is your gun better than theirs? Are they alone? Only after answering these questions should you choose to initiate combat.



PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS

There are 25 projectile weapons, four grenade types and four melee weapons in *PUBG*, but only one can also be used to fry an egg

P&A



WE SPEAK TO CREATIVE DIRECTOR **BRENDAN GREENE** AND CEO AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **CHANG HAN KIM** ABOUT BRINGING THE PC HIT TO XBOX ONE

So, you have a release date!

Brendan Greene: Yes, Xbox Game Preview will be getting *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* on 12 December. This will also include enhancements for Xbox One X, with HDR – no 4K textures yet, but they'll be coming at some time in the future.

What are the biggest challenges involved in adapting a PC title to console?

BG: Well, we use Unreal, which is a really great engine for cross-platform work, so actually getting the build onto Xbox wasn't the hardest thing. We've spent a lot of time over the past few months really starting to optimise it. Publishing with Microsoft has given us a huge range of resources that we can use, and they've been helping us amazingly over the past month or so. They've been sending people to Korea to sync up with the teams in Redmond, and we've been using their user experience teams to test the game and get it really feeling good on consoles. So it's been a tough road, but with Microsoft's help it's been a lot easier.

Chang Han Kim: The biggest challenge, I would say, is the difference in controller. However, we were able to get a lot of know-how and experience from Microsoft because they have experience with other Xbox shooters. Also, we had a lot of feedback from Gamescom and Paris Games Week from people who played *PUBG* using the controllers, and after the Game Preview period we're constantly going to reflect the feedback from the community to tune the feel of the controller.

For Xbox owners who somehow haven't heard of *PUBG*, what do you think makes it so popular?

BG: Well for me it's a very simple concept: it's land, loot and survive.

There's not much to it, but what I think separates it from other shooters is that every single round is unique. You never know what you're going to come across in regards to weapons or items, you never really know where the zone's going to finish.

You've been testing first-person servers recently – are they coming to Xbox as well?

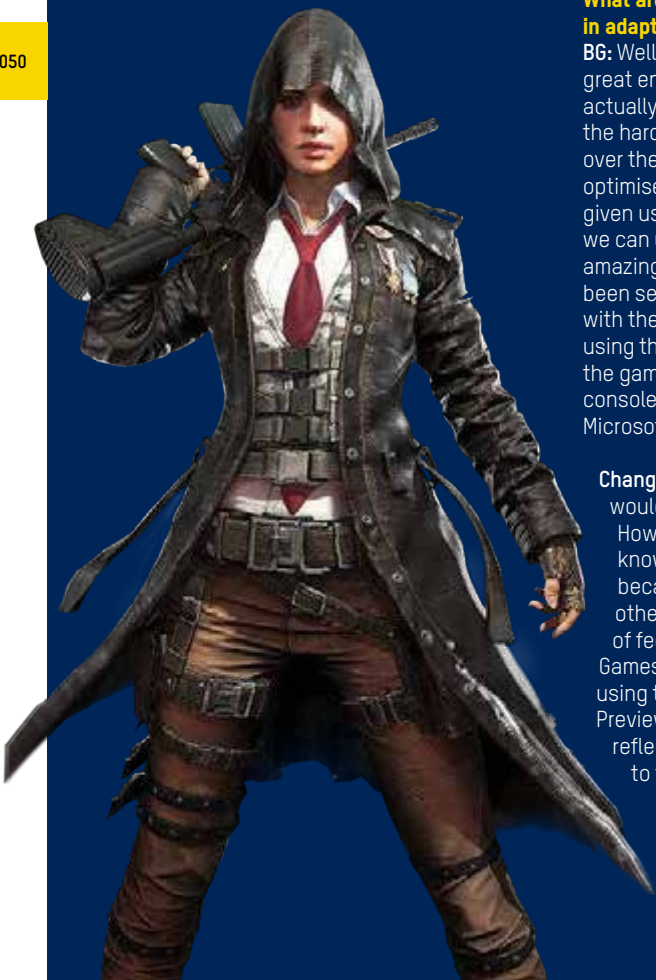
BG: Hopefully in the future, yeah, but at launch we won't have them, we'll only have third-person servers, just because we want to focus on getting the game stable, getting the server system stable. We still want to add first-person servers to the Xbox of course, but right now we kind of want to focus on the build.

Have you had to make any changes specifically for the fact players will be using Xbox controllers?

BG: The guys have been really great at getting the inventory and weapons systems mapped to the controller, so much so that most people I've talked to say it feels really natural, and they've done a really good job. Now of course we'll have to work with the community, and it's why we're doing Game Preview, as it allows us to work with real players and get their feedback on how the controls feel.

PC players get updates all the time. Can Xbox One players expect the same kind of thing?

CHK: Yes, we see Xbox Game Preview very much like Early Access on Steam, so we are trying to evolve the game more with the feedback of the users. We want to push out as many updates as we can, but it's very difficult to do frequent updates when it comes to the console platform, so on this we're currently consulting with the Xbox team on how to make this happen more quickly.





Fans are understandably excited about the new maps. Will these be coming to Xbox One as well, around the same time as on PC?

BG: We're going to be showcasing the new desert map on the PC 1.0 version first, and it will eventually come to the Xbox version but we've no timeline as to when that might happen yet.

What other updates and changes do you have planned for the near future? Is there anything you really want to add?

BG: No, I mean with the PC 1.0 release, we feel that the game is kind of feature complete at that stage – you know, we'll have the vaulting in (vaulting will also be coming to the Xbox Game Preview version at

look at it like *CS:GO*, you know? *Dust* is on its fourth version, right? So I'm hoping that in the next five to ten years, Erangel will be on its fourth version and we're constantly going back and improving and updating it.

One of the things you announced at Gamescom was a loot-box style system for unlocking outfits. There was quite a fan backlash – how did that make you feel?

BG: I honestly feel that having a strong skin economy is really good for the game going forward. These are cosmetic items, it's an optional system. We really believe that in order to maintain the servers and give ourselves a revenue stream over the coming five to ten years where we plan to support

awesome. All I'd ever want from developers entering the battle royale space is that they try to come up with their own unique spin on the battle royale game mode, and not just do a carbon copy, which I feel is a little lazy.

CHK: I think there are actually a lot of carbon copies of the game coming out of China right now, and I don't think that exact carbon copies are beneficial to the environment of the game in any way. I think companies should develop their own battle royale games to expand the genre itself, as well as create a more vibrant ecosystem where more battle royale games can come about.

We know you've primarily been a PC developer, but how have you found it working with the Xbox One X?

CHK: I have 17 years of experience with PC game development, but if you look at the gaming industry in Korea, not a lot of people are focusing on development for console. So we lacked experience in the console industry in general, and we didn't really understand the console community, so we didn't have the experience or resources. But after becoming a second party developer for Xbox, we were able to harness their resources and work with them as if we were one team. We also hope to gain more experience during the Xbox Game Preview term, so we'll be able to grow really quickly in the console market, in the same way that we did on the PC.

On a wider scale, what kind of impact do you think the Xbox One X will have on the console industry, and the game industry as a whole?

BG: Honestly, it's a bit of a beast. I've played *Forza Motorsport 7* running on a 4K TV and it's just beautiful. It's a beast of a machine, so I think it's just going to up the graphical fidelity you get on Xbox, and give a really great experience for the gamers there. ■

"It's a very simple concept: land, loot, and survive. What separates it from other shooters is that every round is unique"

launch) and we have our 3D replay version that we're working on. And once that's added to the system along with real bullet ballistics and penetration, that's kind of where we see the game being feature complete. After that we're not going to finish development, we see it as a kind of permanent beta which we'll also be improving, tuning and upgrading the game over the coming years.

Do you have any really cool ideas that you'd like to include further down the road?

BG: Just some really obvious things, like character levelling systems and stuff like that to give a bit more depth to the character system. Apart from that it's really just that we want to focus on optimising and upgrading the game over the coming years. I always

PUBG, we need some kind of ongoing revenue stream. We feel that cosmetic loot boxes are the way to do this.

And it's not pay-to-win either. You're not selling better weapons, just cosmetic items.

BG: Exactly – it will never be pay-to-win.

How do you feel about other games 'taking inspiration' from your game model and adding battle royale modes to their own titles?

BG: I think it's awesome! Really it grows the genre and keeps us all on our toes. I saw *GTA* released their Motor Wars DLC, and that was insane to me. I remember playing the first *GTA* on LAN with friends, so seeing a title that's held up as one of the biggest gaming titles being inspired by your game is kind of



Jerk was also part of the team at Starbreeze Studios who made the *Riddick* games

Jerk Gustafsson Wolf Pack

NOW THAT WOLFENSTEIN II IS
FINALLY HERE, WE CHAT WITH
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JERK
GUSTAFSSON ABOUT WHAT'S NEXT
FOR WOLFENSTEIN, THE POWER
OF THE XBOX ONE X AND THE
HARDSHIPS OF DEVELOPMENT

DANIELLA LUCAS

The MachineGame office has its very own life-sized Panzerhund

T

his month is a month full of huge games, but *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* has managed to stand out thanks to its impressive shooting and insane story. There's no doubt that it's one of 2017's biggest releases and you can see just how much fun we had following BJ Blazkowicz on his return to America to liberate it from the Nazis in our review over on page 68. But just what went into making it as bombastic as it is, and where does the series go next from here? How do they keep dialling up the madness to top *that* ending?

We sat down to chat with Jerk Gustafsson, executive producer at MachineGames, about how far it's come from the first game and the challenges that emerge when developing a highly anticipated, blockbuster game. They might make it look easy, but there's a lot of work going on behind the scenes to make sure the game turns out great when it reaches players' hands.

We also look to the future and the start of *Wolfenstein III*, plus how the world's most powerful console will raise the standards set for the gaming industry. The future is looking exceptionally bright for MachineGames.

How does it feel now that the game is in people's hands?

It's a bit scary of course – it always is, when you have been working on something for a few years. You have invested a lot of time in it, so you're always nervous about it. But I really do feel that we have a very strong and a very good game.

What kind of reaction did you think you'd get?

Over our entire careers, ever since *Enclave* and *Riddick* and all those games, we have focused a lot on the narrative and also the first-person experience, and I think that in particular will be what people highlight now as well. The storytelling, of course, that is a big, big issue and the other thing is the shooting aspect – the way it feels when you



ABOVE Of course there are giant robotic blimps. Why wouldn't there be?

ABOVE Jerk Gustafsson himself hard at work answering annoying emails from OXM.

move around with a weapon in your hand. I think we have made a lot of great improvements to that since our previous game and within that field, so I at least hope they will be the talking points.

What is it that makes it feel significantly different to the first one?

I think the big step for us is to use the full body for the player. For *The New Order* – and what many games do – is have a floating model that you play with. But for this game, we moved over to a full body, similar to what we had in the *Riddick* games, so you're always physically present in the world, which I feel makes it a lot more fluent and seamless. When you are going to perform certain tasks, certain actions, whether you fall down, you climb a ladder, whatever it is, it's always the full body that is part of the experience. So it feels a little bit more integrated and seamless, and I think that's a big step for us.

On the gameplay side that's more noticeable too – we allow players now to dual-wield different weapons in each hand. In the previous game we'd only allow weapons of a similar type, but as an example, now you can sneak around with a silenced handgun in one hand and a fully auto shotgun in the other. So for those type of things, we have put a lot of focus on it to make sure that selection and movement with those two weapons are fluid.

"The main reason we took it in this direction with alternative history is that it would give us more freedom"

Is there anything that didn't quite make it into the game because you were forced to tone it down?

Not really. I mean it's always been somewhat controversial since we are fighting against the Nazis, but we really haven't... The storytelling and the way we are writing stories, that doesn't differ in any way from what we did with *The New Order*. People seemed to really like the story, so we have turned it up a little bit, I think it is a little bit more crazy and maybe a little bit more controversial but in that way we give ourselves freedom in how we tell the story. And of course, the entire story's about going back to the home country, back to the United States and liberating it, like you say, from the Nazis, so of course that contributes as well to the controversy.

How did you go about getting that balance between fantasy and history to make it feel real?

The main reason that we took it in this direction with alternative history is that it would give us a little bit more freedom in terms of storytelling, but also in terms of what type of gameplay elements we added. We could be a little bit more free when it comes to using sci-fi and enemies and weapons, and introducing robots as an example. For us that was the main reason for moving over to the alternative history – to give us a little bit more freedom in what we could do in terms of technology and those types of elements.

The series is known for being quite OTT. How did you go about topping the previous one?



We haven't really held back anything, so in terms of storytelling we've been pushing it in a way that we feel really dials it up.

What have been your greatest challenges making this game?

When you develop games nowadays, the time it takes... the development periods are so long, so we are very careful that when we lay the foundations, we stick to them. But you always have to be flexible – over two-and-a-half to three years, a lot of things change, not only on the technical side but also in a lot of other respects. New people are coming in, some people may leave – there's always those types of challenges, there's so many things that change when you're in development. And since we are using an updated version of id Tech 6 we

have encountered a lot of challenges in terms of tech in general; the new animation pipeline and the new script system. All of those things have been providing lots of extra challenges, but also fun challenges because they allow us to make the game that we really want to make, and make sure that we can meet our ambitions from where we start.

What's your proudest moment?

I think that usually is at the end. Also, [I'm really proud of] the team we have, since we have a core group that we have been working with for so long. We have always been good at making sure things get together in the end, and we've seen a lot of progress here in the last month.

And when you see all of that coming together, even though it's a hectic and stressful period with a lot of work, it's also the most fun and rewarding time, because when you see all these things coming together, you feel great. You get that extra motivation and that extra push to finish the game, and of course you're also very proud not only of the work you have done and the product that has come together, but also you become very proud of the team and all the effort that the team puts into it. Yeah – this one especially has been extremely rewarding.

Now that the game is out, what's your next move? Is it time for a little break?

I think when you put the pen down on something, then at that moment you're at your most eager to get started on something new, because you have





ABOVE LEFT
Sometimes we
wish we could
throw an axe
at the head
of magazine
deadlines like
this. Cathartic.



Sometimes the game feels even like more of a trip than an LSD-induced hallucination

→ so many new ideas and new things you want to do. Of course, people will have some rest and the team will have well-deserved time off, but we are also eager to get started on something new and continue to work on this *Wolfenstein* IP that we have come to love so much. Then what we're doing now is some DLC work.

What are your plans for the rest of the *Wolfenstein* series? How far along is *Wolfenstein III*?

Even from the very beginning – when we set out to start work on *The New Order* – we had always planned this as a trilogy, and this is the second game. Whatever happens in the future we will have to see;

“The focus has been to make sure that we can present the game in the best possible way and use the power that the new Xbox One X provides”

it depends on how well the game does – but we have always planned for a trilogy and we as a team would love to continue to work with *Wolfenstein*. Still, you never know what will happen.

So we guess the third game is already in some form of planning stage?

No – we have focused on this game and there are always ideas you have floating around and there are things that you want to do but nothing really concrete. The focus has been this, and now we are focused on the Xbox One X release as well, and then we will go onto some DLC stuff from there, and then we'll see.

How have you found working with the Xbox One X?

It's a super powerful machine and the game runs really, really well – it looks fantastic on the Xbox One X. The focus has been to make sure that we can present the game in the best possible way and use the console and the power that the new console provides.



And of course, everything from lighting and graphics overall – in terms of visual quality it will be a lot closer to the high-end PCs than the regular consoles.

Do you think the Xbox One X will change the gaming industry?

Yeah – I hope so at least. If you have the possibility to develop and deliver games that run in 4K resolution and look that fantastic, of course you want to take that opportunity. It will set a new standard for games moving forward. ■

If you want to read more about *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* turn to p68 for our in-depth review. But, if that's not enough there's also three pieces of DLC to look forward to in the coming months.



Best of
Machine
Games/
Starbreeze

2004

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

Made when the studio was still Starbreeze and set in the *Riddick* film universe, this was highly praised.

2007

THE DARKNESS

A tale that starts out about mobsters and the Mafia, but ends up going on a supernaturally-powered murder spree with some fun powers to exploit.

2009

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

The *Butcher's Bay* sequel didn't quite live up to it's predecessor. It was made during a period of turmoil.

2014

WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER

This relaunch of the series showed what the newly-formed MachineGames was capable of and was a return to form for the team.

2015

WOLFENSTEIN: THE OLD BLOOD

A smaller prequel project that features a reimagining of the classic Castle Wolfenstein that nods to the original games.



OXM INVESTIGATES

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HORROR ON XBOX

From zombies to physical manifestations of your deepest flaws, these are the horror games that defined Xbox's past

DANIELLA LUCAS

The weather outside is frightful, and the fire is out of control. Also we're in an abandoned asylum with a team of sketchy military agents and guys in lab coats, and there's one dude that looks a bit pale and won't stop scratching his arm and eating it. Sound familiar? Like a repeated nightmare you've been having over the last 15 years perhaps? The kind that makes your heart race and your thumbs sweat... oh wait, no, that's just horror games.

It's one of the most popular genres in gaming thanks to the way it gets your adrenaline pumping, and things have only got better over the years. From early beginnings in jump-scares and creepy but basic visuals, now games will even use psychological tricks to unnerve you. They've come a long, long way since the launch of the original Xbox, so let's take a look back to see just how much they've evolved to get better at scaring us. Brrrrr.



01

→ SILENT HILL 2

It a sequel, but is definitely the most iconic of the whole series thanks to the way the town draws on elements of your character's psyche to create horribly grotesque monsters such as Pyramid Head, shambling nurses with no faces, and a spider mannequin thing that's made of human legs. Add to that a scene where you have to stick your arm into a filthy toilet and you've got yourself a party. The enemy design was so unlike anything else at the time that they disturbed your senses every time you found one lurking in the fog – no standard zombies here. There is one, small beacon of light and hope though, and that's thanks to one of its multiple endings where you discover the whole thing has been orchestrated by a Shiba Inu. Such horror. Wow.

DEV Konami
RELEASE Oct 2002



02

02

PROJECT ZERO II

Also known as *Fatal Frame* in the US, this came at a time when Japanese horror was at its peak, with films like *The Ring* releasing around the same point. You play as a slightly creepy pair of twins who are out exploring an abandoned village full of spirits that definitely don't want to be your friend. It turns out a sacrificial ritual went awry years before, and now one of the spirits want to use you in their place to appease the hellish abyss lurking beneath the village. You can't see any of the ghosts normally, you'll have to keep looking through a magic camera to be able to see them before they get too close to you. It's horrible knowing that there's something out there, just loitering around you, but you can't see it to fight it.

DEV Koei Tecmo
RELEASE Nov 2003



03

03

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

This horror/thriller is all about trying to use your investigative skills to catch a psychotic murderer who preys on other murderers by traipsing through loads of old, condemned buildings in the city of Metro. It's not a nice place, with criminals and psychopaths everywhere you go, and it only seems to be getting worse thanks to a huge increase in the number of people going mad – even your hero Ethan is starting to lose his mind. While it's not perfect, the game was well received... except in Germany where it was banned in 2008 due to its violence. It was well liked for its combat and controls, and because of how utterly brutal it was. While it wasn't always spooky, the nastiness of it definitely crept under your skin.

DEV Monolith Productions
RELEASE Dec 2005



01

060

↓ HORROR – A BRIEF HISTORY

SILENT HILL 2
Haunted toilets and
Pyramid Head.

2002

PROJECT ZERO II
Creepy, long-haired
girls strike back.

2003

2005

**CONDEMNED:
CRIMINAL ORIGINS**
Getting madder.

2006

FEAR
More creepy girls,
but with guns.

2008

DEAD SPACE
Inspired by and
inspired *Alien*.



04

04

FEAR

It's always creepy little black-haired girls isn't it? Though despite how clichéd that monster-type has become, the *FEAR* series showed games how it *should* be done. You're part of a special forces unit which is tasked with investigating supernatural phenomenon – in this case telepaths causing chaos and killing loads of people. The hugely powerful Alma is at the centre of it all, and has spent years in a coma being experimented on and mistreated horribly by a company trying to use her powers. The game was great at getting into your head rather than relying on jump scares, with clues to what was really going on scattered throughout each area for you to piece together yourself. It paved the way for a very successful series.

DEV Monolith Productions
RELEASE May 2006



06

05

DEAD SPACE

One of the best games you could get on the Xbox 360, it was highly praised for putting a sci-fi spin on the horror genre, for its limb-slicing mechanic and for a health bar hidden in the back of your helmet. You start out investigating a distress signal on a mining ship but quickly discover that it's been overrun by hideous necromorphs after getting stuck there yourself. You need to make your way around the ship fixing things while you wait to be rescued, but the longer you're there the more you discover about just what the miners were digging up. The space setting makes everything feel tense and claustrophobic. A lot of horror games have been borrowing from it since, and you can definitely see a lot of where *Alien Isolation*'s brilliant execution came from.

DEV EA
RELEASE Oct 2008



05

06

ALAN WAKE

This horror story set itself apart by following a more television show-based structure with episodes that end in cliffhangers to ramp up the tension. More psychological thriller than true horror, you play as the titular character as he explores the town Bright Falls on a vacation gone wrong. Unfortunately, it's steadily being taken over by 'darkness', turning loads of humans and animals into murderous shadows known as 'Taken'. One of the most useful tools in your arsenal is your trusty torch which you can use to shine on enemies to weaken them, so the whole game becomes a tense struggle as you try to manage your battery power so you're not left in the dark where all of the horrible things can get you.

DEV Remedy Entertainment
RELEASE May 2010



06

ALAN WAKE

Be very afraid of the dark. Bring a torch.

2010

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Horror icon finally comes to Xbox 360.

2011

OUTLAST

Run away from the nasty Asylum.

2014

2014

ALIEN: ISOLATION
Better than the recent films.

2017

RESIDENT EVIL 7
Be wary of dinner party invites.



07

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Yes, this absolute classic of the genre had been out for five years already in 2011, but it was the first time that Xbox 360 owners could get their hands on it, surprisingly, which is why it's this far into the list. It's one of the most iconic games of all time, famous for putting an entirely new spin on its classic zombie origins and for helping redefine third-person shooters thanks to its innovative over-the-shoulder angling which is now a hallmark of the genre. While not the scariest game in this list, the action and pacing was fantastic at keeping you tense throughout without frustrating. It also marked a shift in gaming in general, one where previous console exclusives began to be shared more often on rival consoles.

DEV Capcom
RELEASE Sep 2011



08

OUTLAST

Of all the places you could go as a reporter to get a big scoop, dilapidated psychiatric hospitals should never be on the list. No good can ever come from it, as our hapless hero Miles Upshur discovers. After being led there for a story, you find yourself in way over your head and forced to go deeper into the hospital filled with murderous patients. To top it all off, you can't even defend yourself. The only thing you can do is run, hide and hope that the mutated monstrosities don't find you as you unravel this tale of science and religion gone horribly, horribly wrong. It was widely praised for its lack of combat as it made you feel far more vulnerable than you ever thought possible in a videogame.

DEV Red Barrels Studio
RELEASE June 2014



09

ALIEN ISOLATION

Crossing the streams between gaming and films rarely ends well, but Creative Assembly gave this iconic horror the treatment it deserved, and created a better sequel to the original movies than the latest batch of films. It's a simple set-up – you play as Ripley's daughter searching for information on what happened to her, when you find yourself stranded on a space station with a Xenomorph on board. It's masterfully tense, perfectly capturing that sense of being alone with something awful constantly hunting you. But it's not just the Aliens you have to worry about – other survivors are after the same resources you are and the androids aren't on your side either. Definitely not a fun day at the office.

DEV Creative Assembly
RELEASE Oct 2014

10

RESIDENT EVIL 7

Yes, this makes it a second *Resi* game on this list, but being a series so tightly connected to the horror genre it was bound to happen. It's also a great example of the direction modern horror is going – into smaller, more intense experiences, and there's no better series that demonstrates this shift than *Resident Evil*. After the critical acclaim of the fourth game, things went downhill. Capcom kept trying to recreate *Resi 4* with more excitement and ended up with two rather average action-shooter games that weren't very scary at all. Fans became concerned for the future of the series, but after going back to the basics they've released an absolute belter of a game with *Resi 7*.

You're lured to a derelict plantation by a message from your missing wife, but once you're there you discover that there is something seriously nasty going on involving horrible mutations and mould. The whole place is rundown and dirty, but the relatively small areas that you have to navigate give the game a great sense of place and a hint of claustrophobia. It feels a lot like the mansion from the very first *Resi* game, full of puzzles with grim outcomes and horrible secrets. It's a perfect example of a modern horror game that others will follow – taking lessons from advancements in gameplay styles, but remembering that small moments are the things that make your skin crawl the most.

DEV Capcom
RELEASE Jan 2017

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NEW GAMES REVIEWS

066

REVIEW

Your gaming month sorted with
our definitive reviews

Pro tip: if you want to stress out an editor, release loads of great games all at once

HOW WE SCORE:

Can't make sense of our out-of-ten rating system? Then see below for your at-a-glance guide.

- 10 A gaming masterpiece
- 9 An essential slice of brilliance
- 8 Give it a whirl and you won't regret it
- 7 Some minor flaws but still good
- 6 Solid, but not setting any loins aflame
- 5 Average. Not good, but not terrible either
- 4 Honks just a bit
- 3 Look away, lest ye be tainted
- 2 Angry-makingly bad
- 1 Just... no...

β Titles with this symbol are on Game Preview, so while they aren't finished, you can still find out if they're worth playing.



Irrespective of score, the Editor's Choice award is given to games with the quality, ambition or uniqueness to stand out from the crowd.

We really struggled to fit in all of these reviews this month – this issue is absolutely packed with fantastic games in the run-up to Christmas. It's never been a better time to be an Xbox gamer. First up on the front lines we've got **Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus** (p68) making an explosive entrance with its take on a Nazi-run America in the '60s. Make sure you run in all guns blazing to tackle its wonderfully insane story. Covering the rear in our campaign to tackle this year's greatest month in gaming is **Call Of Duty: WWII** (p72). Has going back to its roots helped revitalise this stalwart of the first-person-shooter genre? We've thoroughly tested it to find out if the past or the future is a better place to set the series. Also looking to go back to its roots after taking a much-needed break is **Assassin's Creed Origins** (p76) with its rich parkour playground set in Ancient Egypt. It's been on our radar for quite some time thanks to how truly amazing it looks on Xbox One X, and now we've finally gone hands-on with it to uncover all of its secrets. Lastly we've also been taking some lessons in how to hide our identity with **South Park: The Fractured But Whole** (p88), thanks to some superhero-based escapades. Insensitive jokes and horrendous farting is the secret to successfully staying hidden while out late at night solving crimes, right? Please don't tell our parents.



068



072



076



088

067

→ KEEP UP TO DATE WITH THE LATEST OXM REVIEWS AT WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM

REVIEW

The game's Star Card collectibles all feature members of the development art team



068



PUBLISHER BETHESDA / DEVELOPER MACHINEGAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £49.99



Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus

IT'LL BE ALL REICH NOW **DOM PEPIATT**

As *The New Colossus* begins, William Joseph 'BJ' Blazkowicz is dying. He's been mortally wounded – as per the events of the last game – and now he's on his last legs. Except he's not, because he's confined to a wheelchair. And that's where the game picks up: it puts you in a chair, takes away a lot of that mobility and fluidity the series has become famed for, puts a gun in your hand and says 'go get 'em'.

The most striking thing about *The New Colossus* compared to its forebear is how damn well MachineGames has perfected its craft from the narrative side. Everything

ABOVE BJ may be a kind-hearted guy, but he's fighting violence with violence, in every way he can.

from the first game is turned up a notch in the sequel: the script is pacey and satisfying, the production values are off-the-charts, the voice acting some of the best you'll get in the genre. Seriously. Everything from the way characters interrupt each other mid-sentence – *Archer* style – to the unflinching political statements meted out by both sides of the fascist regime are on point. Before you even get to the gameplay, MachineGames deserves praise simply recognising its narrative vision so perfectly.

There are *lengthy* cutscenes in this game – something you don't really get to see very much any more – but that's no bad thing: every cutscene serves to further characterise BJ's ragtag bunch of rebel friends, provide

you with yet more flavour of this grim, weird alternate world where Nazis took over, or simply allow BJ the room to be the action hero he deserves to be.

Scene and heard

The cutscenes look great, and there's little-to-no disconnect between the moments where control is wrested away from you and the moments where you're sitting back and watching the action unfold. Such is the level of immersion offered by the world, from the blown-out ruins of New York to the moist claustrophobia of the underwater U-boat that you call home.

That world was the star of *The New Order*, too, but *The New Order* felt like a very different game with a very different focus: back in



→ MachineGames' first take on the series, you were forced into the sewers, you were a Resistance, holding grimly onto everything you held dear as the world around you was ripped apart by violence and everything you loved was suppressed.

The New Colossus has a whole different tone. This is a tale of uprising, of a people no longer tolerant of fascism, of ignorance. Blazkowicz – the eponymous new colossus, for sure – is an unbridled monster by the end of the game. A titan given the tools to destroy. And the fun thing is: that's where you come in. You get to harness this killing machine, you get to take the reigns of this furious man (with everything to lose), and the tools MachineGames gives you to do that results in the ultimate first-person shooter wish fulfillment.

That mission where you're wheelchair-bound and struggling to kill the Nazi forces? That's the base level. From there, the game escalates thematically, mechanically and metaphorically. You play through BJ's effective rebirth – the lite-RPG upgrade system that's bolted onto the game makes sense as you rebuild the Resistance's shattered armoury, the upgrades you and your body get as you mow down more enemies make sense, and the constant, evolving sense of satisfaction you get from popping Nazi skulls and snapping

ABOVE The man himself travels a satisfying arc in this game, from his wounded state at the start to the agent of death by the end.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A violent uprising against alt-history Nazis, told in the form of an FPS.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

The Man In The High Castle written by Tarantino. On steroids.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone that's ever picked up a shooter and wanted *more*, in every way.

fascist limbs never grows old...

despite your death count approaching the thousands by the end of the 20-to-30 hour campaign.

During this journey, you effectively get to go on a roadtrip through this altered America, tasting various zones – from the husk of a detonated New York City (where you're told three million men, women and children were destroyed by atomic bombs) to a wonderfully preserved, Nazi-flavoured version of Roswell's Americana. There are other locales to discover, too, but we won't spoil them here: this is an incredibly varied game, and while you might still have the usual caverns and sewers you'd expect of a FPS, at least they're done in a more interesting way than the de facto 'Bunker level' you get in just about every other shooter.

Choose death

The game will keep on finding new mechanics to give you, too. From very early in the game, you start to understand that the levels are designed in such a way that you can play them three ways: you can go in, all guns and testosterone, dual-wielding, chaotic and rampant. Or you can choose to stealth it – approach your targets with more caution, take them out one by one and only go loud when necessary. Or – and this is our favourite – you can combine the two, thinking tactically, exploiting the

environment at *just the right time* to really cause a ruckus at the most opportune moment.

The levels are built to let you do this, and the generous combinations of single-handed and dual-wield weapon options mean that you're always tooled up for the encounters – no matter how hard they become. And *Wolfenstein II* is a hard game when it wants to be: some encounters with Panzerhunds can be incredibly challenging if you're not ready for them, and there's even a brutal permadeath mode for the ballsiest of Antifa fantasists.

But it never feels like you're judged for doing things one way instead of another: the game never outright forces you to stealth something, nor does it ever *make* you engage in a firefight. Its mechanics are simple, the stealth is not complex... yet it's entirely functional and readable as a system. Enemies have lines of sight – hell, the dogs can even *smell* you if you're hanging around in stealth. But the game never rubs that in your face, or makes it 'a thing'. It just lets you do you, and that's delightful in a game like this.

Extra missions thrown into the mix allow you to revisit areas you've already fought through, and shows again MachineGames' commitment to variety and level design – different enemy combinations, layouts and

The series began way back in 1981 with *Castle Wolfenstein*, developed by Muse Software



ABOVE The game occasionally lurches in BJ's awful personal life, and these moments of introspection are hard to watch.

LEFT Some of the game's set-pieces make other shooters' take on the idea look, frankly, paltry.

tactics can make even the most claustrophobic levels seem wholly different, and that's a skill. There's easily over 40 hours of content if you want to unearth everything, and play it on its harder settings.

Better yet, revisiting a location allows you to indulge even more in the game's stellar soundtrack. Composed by Bethesda OST veteran Mick Gordon, the backing music veers unpredictably from chugging metal riffs to slide-guitar electronica – and all of it fits. The music ramps up spectacularly as you ready your two shotguns and approach a proper little battle arena, and then subsides just as quick as the game turns to focus on an intimate moment between two of the main supporting cast.

Gordon manages to reflect the chaotic turbulence the game's world is built around, and – like any big budget Hollywood offering over on the cinematic side of things – his work complements everything as you do it. The game's three styles of play (stealth, rampage, tactical) all seem to dynamically morph to the eclectic beats Gordon lays down, and as such you could argue *Wolfenstein II*'s soundtrack becomes just as integral to the game as even *Doom*'s sludge-laden metal-inspired audio.

From the grand, sweeping themes tackled by this game's narrative to the gritty, endlessly satisfying moment-

CHALLENGE YOU TO A DUAL

The dual-wielding is so much more than just a gimmick. It's a well rounded, tactical system. It doesn't just want you to acquire two juiced-up shotguns and go to town (though that is fun). No, it's more complex than that: the game wants you to mix and match – it wants you to know that you can clear a corridor with the shotgun then take out campers at the other end without changing or reloading. You learn to speak the language of Being A Guy That Can Carry Two Guns, and it's a wonderful language to speak.

“There’s easily over 40 hours of content in this game if you want to unearth everything, and play it on its harder settings”

to-moment gunplay, *Wolfenstein II* delivers. It shows you a country where it's all gone wrong and asks you to set it right, urging you to choose your weapon from a bulging armoury. Even the game's physical weapon of choice – the hatchet – is wonderfully dealt with: every thrown axe, every stealth decapitation, every super-soldier parry... it's all done so well. The animations pair with the light, responsive mechanics, which pairs with the impeccable sound design – everything in the game works in unison to create a macabre waltz of violent ecstasy that you'll struggle to find celebrated so well in many other games this decade.

Different Order

The New Colossus is an upgrade of everything *The New Order* has to offer: from the dual-wielding, always on-point gunplay to the perks you get for performing actions – all of it has been refined. The narrative treads the line between dark comedy and insightful political satire, veers violently in tone from toilet humour to

PTSD – but does it with self-awareness and tact.

The New Colossus is a game with its finger on the pulse. It finds time for the dirt-under-the-fingernails mundanity of humanity, while indulging in the violent delights of simulated bloodshed and chaos. It operates on a heartbeat of a rhythm between primal, angry action and a very human story told in a very human way. It's remarkably rare to find a game that plays as well as this, and has such a necessary and gripping story to tell, and you should cherish every blood-drenched second you have with it. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Smart, satisfying, brutal: undoubtedly one of the best shooters of the generation.

9

The first game that director Glen Schofield worked on was *Barbie Game Girl* on Game Boy

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / DEVELOPER SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £49.99

Call Of Duty: WWII

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY MAKES EVERYTHING NEW AGAIN **LEON HURLEY**



Taking *Call Of Duty* back to where it all started – the trenches and history of World War 2 – turns out to be the

smartest thing the series has done in a while. This year's gimmick is not to have one: the guns are... just guns. There are no drones or tech, and everything can just breathe a bit more as a result.

The multiplayer side of things is the biggest winner. While there are probably plenty who are going to flip out that their boost jumps and 'kill EVERYTHING' scorestreaks are gone, there's a purity to the online stuff that the series hasn't seen for years. Without the tech and gadgets, the focus is far more on your playing ability; about mastering guns, getting to know the maps and just having fun. After the increasing speed and visual noise of previous instalments, there's a cleaner purity to the online action here – a slower pace that means you know what and how you died, and maybe what you can do about it in the future.

That's not to say the challenge isn't there anymore, it's just more accessible and understandable. The Division system introduces five basic classes for you to play with – effectively 'basic soldier', assault, heavy, sniper and 'expeditionary', who leans towards grenades and scavenging supplies. You can access more or less all the equipment available as any option but each has a set of unique abilities you can unlock as you level up to suit how you play. Infantry, for example, can move faster while aiming down the sights, while Armoured are less bothered by explosions, grenades and other equipment. It's leaner and, as a result, so much easier to understand and apply.

Battle stations

Two of the big new additions this year are War mode and Headquarters. The first one lets two teams play through a linear objective-based map – stealing or destroying supplies, storming Normandy beaches, or escorting vehicles to checkpoints. It's a simple addition but one that

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A World War 2 shooter mixing single player action and multiplayer challenge.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A playable action movie full of set-pieces to test your shooting skills.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone who likes pretending to be a soldier and chasing online KD ratios.

brings teams together, focusing and coordinating their efforts on group goals. Each stage is basically a redressed Hardpoint/CTF style thing about holding or taking an area/object but the swinging momentum as it moves along creates a satisfying draw. The only downside is that there's currently only three maps. No matter how much fun they are, we're going to need new stuff as soon as possible to keep things interesting.

Headquarters, on the other hand, is where you go when you want to take a break and fiddle with your gear. It's basically *Destiny's* Tower, something Activision has been so careful to avoid saying we're almost impressed. Taking the shape of a D-Day beach command post there are various soldiers scattered around where you can collect bounties for completing objectives, check/change/buy gear and so on. It's also where you can open your supply drops, test your guns in a firing range, and play 1v1 matches in an area called 'The Pit' (which is great to just mess about in). It's perhaps the most interesting part of this year's game given the



FAR LEFT The big set-piece battles of World War 2 return and that means BEACH LANDING!

LEFT Just like in the real war, some Germans surrendered and it's your call whether to shoot or spare them.



“The single-player has spectacle in all the right places and a good second half”

more social and active online life it suggests for the future.

There are lots of interesting changes then, but perhaps slightly disappointingly, zombies isn't one of them. *WW2's* entry is... basically the same as it's always been. Which isn't a bad thing, but the pre-release build up seemed to suggest we'd be getting something new and different. Art style aside – dark and nasty after last year's day-glo '80s fun – this is the same wave-based, area unlocking, power up chasing setup as before. It's still a challenging and entertaining exercise in coordinated team work and swearing, just nothing like the revolution the secretive trailer teases suggested.

Go it alone

Single-player this year is, for the most part, as competent and entertaining as ever. Again benefiting from a simpler palette, you spend more time 'in

HANG OUT IN HEADQUARTERS

Call Of Duty is not exactly a game you think about chilling out in, but the new Headquarters social area is probably going to make that a big part of this year's game. While it's a functional space for customisation, loadout tweaking and challenge collecting, things like the 1v1 Pit and firing range mean you can just hang out with your friends. There are even some old Activision 2600 games to play when all that war gets too much.

the moment' rather than jumping from soldier to drone to satellite every five minutes. The reality of the weapons and events you're playing through also adds an edge. Whether you're fighting your way through the slaughter of the D-Day landings, or the exploding trees of an artillery bombardment, or even just a French village shootout, the gunplay and action are more direct; the spectacle more impactful with less distractions.

There are a few things that don't quite work. Certain members of your squad provide the gear you need as you play – extra ammo, health, grenades and so on. It's a great idea in theory, as a literal gameplay manifestation of the 'no man fights alone' mantra of the original *WW2 CODs*. However, in practice it only works if they're in range – needing a health pack and discovering the health pack guy's nowhere to be seen can be a pain.

The story is also a little lacking in places. Characterisation feels rather blunt, with various people little more than walking, talking manifestations of their role – friend, antagonist and so on. It works well enough but feels more functional than anything. There's also an oddly lacking sense of why anything's happening or who the bad guys are. It's an odd thing to say given that this is built around one of the most famous conflicts in human history, but events just sort of happen with little explanation. Previous World War 2 *Call Of Dutys* generally did a great example of setting the scene, the scale of events and why X was happening, or Y important. This lacks that coherence and feels more like a shuffled collection of good set-pieces rather than a carefully made playlist. A few stealth sections and 'because people expect them' vehicle bits are also a bit... [shrugs]. Not terrible, just adding little or feeling a bit needless.

In a way, it's funny that *Call Of Duty* had to go back to move forwards, but overall the *WW2* retread freshens up the series in a way that another science fiction future jump would have probably struggled to achieve. The single-player has spectacle in all the right places and a good second half despite some rough edges, while the multiplayer's the most coherent and fun it's been in ages. It'll be interesting to see where *COD* goes next year. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

A streamlined multiplayer and less gimmicky single-player gives *COD* a nice refresh.

8

The dev team's a who's who of Capcom: *DMC*'s Hideaki Itsuno, *Resi*'s Hiroyuki Kobayashi, and *Breath Of Fire*'s Makoto Ikehara

PUBLISHER CAPCOM / DEVELOPER CAPCOM / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £19.99

Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen

GOING BACK TO SOME OLD SCHOOL HARDCORE PAWN **LEON HURLEY**

Sometimes an RPG just nails that sense of open-world exploration – of not quite being sure what to expect but setting out anyway, to learn through trial and error, and well-earned progression. *Dragon's Dogma* gets it. Creating a place that you grow into, and master through your own efforts rather than carefully guided missions.

The core parts are instantly familiar: a ye olde world medieval setting full of knights and mages, goblins and dragons. You pick quests, level up and gradually move from bumbling village newb hammered by the smallest foe, to a force to be reckoned with, taking down 20 foot ogres with ease. While the world, characters and set-up might be very 'trad fantasy RPG' *Dragon's Dogma* has a few tricks to freshen the mix. The main one being the Pawns. Human in appearance, these magical entities are summoned to form your party, one 'main' you keep for good and two you can swap out at any time. They're oddly charming as, not quite being real people: everything's amazing to them.

Where things get really interesting is that the two ringers you can swap out are actually other players' Pawns, while your main is also 'borrowed' whenever you rest. Pawns remember everything they do so it's possible you might hire someone with prior knowledge of a mission or area you've not encountered yet, or your main might come back with similar info because they've already seen it with

RIGHT This is a game all about killing monsters, which occasionally means climbing on them. As fun as it is satisfying.

BELOW Your party is made up of 'Pawns', magical entities you can summon that are actually other players' companions. Up to you!

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

An open world RPG full of medieval castles, caves and monsters.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A lighter, less doomy *Dark Souls*. Not quite as ruthless but it's not going to hold your hand, either.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People who like to tame massive worlds and build a powerful character from nothing.



"Missions spring up constantly and it creates a lovely feeling of place"

another player. It's weird, but a really interesting system as, while you never have any direct contact with anyone online, you're aware they exist.

Dark memories

Elsewhere there's a hint of *Dark Souls*. A dangerous comparison I know but it's possible to enter areas full of enemies you can't possibly defeat, or die and restart back at a distant checkpoint because you didn't take a threat seriously. The game gives you no help here – it's about knowing your limits. The real similarity with From's games is how your progression is tied to your ability to survive new areas and reach the point you can endure them to progress further.

Missions spring up constantly and it creates a lovely feeling of a place, filled with many things to do and discover, rather than a background for a single story. That challenge is just enough that the quest feels meaningful. Your max health, for example, can be lowered as you take damage and only restored by resting

or eating certain things. It means you need to prepare, resupply and think about what you're going to do. And not be afraid to abandon it and run away if needs be.

Life's made a little easier by the ability to change classes, or vocations as they're called here. There are three main options to begin with – Fighter (swords), Strider (daggers and bows) and Mages (magic, obviously) – and advanced hybrids later on. The freedom lets you tune your approach to suit your mood and opens up a lot more fun to experiment.

You could argue *Dragon's Dogma* was a little ahead of its time in 2012. The unusual online and class systems and open-world freedom felt odd then because there wasn't quite anything else like it. But it says a lot that now, five years later, it still feels fresh and interesting. Worth both a replay and experiencing for the first time. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Capcom's cult favourite is worth the attention of any RPG/adventure fan out there.

8





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More time passed between the pyramids of Giza being built and Cleopatra's reign than between her and the present day

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT / FORMAT XBOX ONE, XBOX ONE X / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £54.99

Assassin's Creed: Origins

WALK, RUN, JUMP AND SHIMMY LIKE AN EGYPTIAN ROBERT DOUGLAS



Here's a game with a lot to prove. Its immediate predecessors in the mainline *Creed* series were a failed

multiplayer-flavoured experimental sojourn in buggy Paris (*Unity*) and a sturdy but ultimately rather forgettable *sourie* in cockney-infused London (*Syndicate*). This set of city sandbox stealthers has seen its most innovative, genre-defining moves arguably done better elsewhere in recent times. Now, with an extra year to bake in the oven after a controversial one-every-year period, *Assassin's Creed* is back. The good news? The quality spiral is well and truly over. *Origins* is *Creed* at its best, on a par with the likes of *Black Flag* and even perennial charmer Ezio's renaissance era rambles.

The main ingredient, as always, is the setting, and in Ancient Egypt, much as many fans will have predicted since the series' inception, Ubisoft has found a most suitable

playground. You have pyramids to scamper up, lush Nile deltas to gawk at and underground tombs to plunder. All of these things are as arresting as they at first sound. But cleverly, Ubisoft has picked a particular period in the history of this long-gone era. In '50s BC, much of what we think of as 'ancient' (the aforementioned pyramids and tombs) are already entering myth and legend and awaiting a good puzzle-solving plunder. Meanwhile Cleopatra and Ptolemy vie for power, seeing you buffet around a maelstrom of political churnings, and delving into diverse and, for the most part, deftly handled, moral and spiritual quandaries.

And in Bayek, *Assassin's Creed* has found another protag worth turning up for. A firebrand dealt a dark murderous blow at the opening of the tale, Bayek is a Medjay, a sort of sheriff turned handyman, who's tasked with helping the people of Egypt when they are in need. There's a slight whiff of Geralt of Rivia here, not least because the Medjay are, at

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

The tenth major instalment in the now 10-year-old *Assassin's Creed* franchise, and its biggest open world to date.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A streamlined *Assassin's Creed* game, with the tedious bits (tailing missions!) taken out.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Creed fans will lap it up, natch, but this marks a great entry point in the story for novice assassins too.

the outset of the game's story, part of an old, failing and nearly mystical tradition that many in the world find baffling or scorn-worthy. And yet Bayek, with a wry grin here, a sly aside there, can turn an NPC fetch quest request into a knowing nod to the player. Yes, it's mad that this spice seller can't tell the bread maker next door that he loves her. But hey, this is humanity, and it's your job to help.

Sand box

Not that the things you do in *Origins* feel rote or tired in any way. The mini map is gone, replaced with a *Skyrim*-esque compass with key points of interest popping up whenever you are near. This immediately grants the game an air of exploration, ushering you away from the objective marker and towards other potentially interesting things. A particular highlight of ours came when we set out across an expansive desert south of Giza, where heat haze sizzles off the horizon and where sloping dunes obscure your view. Spend too much

“Proves that there is still room for great experiences in this franchise”

RIGHT If you are looking for one game to justify your Xbox One X purchase then look no further. *Origins*’ Egypt in 4K will leave you slack-jawed.



FAR LEFT There is a modern-day element to the story but it's perhaps the most unintrusive that the futuristic out-of-Animus action has ever been.

LEFT Aya, Bayek's ass-kicking wife, plays an integral role in the assassin order origin story as it unfolds.

time out in the desert and you may even see a mirage, which might even lead you to [REDACTED]...

A key component here which differentiates this game from its forebears, is the amount and variety of space afforded your parkour shenanigans. Those aforementioned deserts give way to lush oases, with whole communities of merchants, travellers and bandits set up around them. There are great lakes filled with triremes and fishermen, as well as hippos and crocodiles to contend with. There are dense cities, such as Alexandria or Memphis, which all feel distinct and separate in design and narrative scope as much as they feel unified through the time and setting.

Going combatty

It's a genuine shame that the combat is not as tactile and robust as it clearly wants to be. A new loot system, complete with *Destiny*'s colour-coded rarity indicators, initially promises much. Dodge-rolling, bait and switching, shield-bashing:

PYRAMID SCHEMES

With the general furore still thrashing surrounding loot boxes, it's worth touching on the fact that they do exist here in *Origins*. They are, for the most part, unnecessary, however, and the game doesn't tutorialise them or shove them down your throat. They do, however, tend to contain the best loot, which can undermine your in-game efforts somewhat. That special fire-sword is somehow rendered slightly less special when you know it might be got for a few quid without any actual effort.

all are viable tactics, and learning weapons attack animations is a mighty important element. But there's a strange lack of proportion between how much has been done to enable you in combat, when so little has been changed in the way you handle yourself in stealthy situations. You can still find yourself endlessly whistling to lure idiot guards around corners or into bushes. Stealth here is lightweight and breezy, while the combat is dense and difficult. This leads to a neat balance in the way you play: you will want to make things as smooth as possible for yourself to complete a mission, and therefore you will favour stealth, but it ensures that combat comes across as fidgety or annoying rather than complex or deep. It is a *Dark Souls*-esque combat system bereft of that game's sense of satisfaction and lent instead an air of tedium.

Stealth and combat feel in turns under and over-cooked, then, but the overall package is much more than the sum of its parts. Egypt is utterly

spellbinding and a feat of technical prowess and manpower the likes of which you only see very rarely across entire console generations. It's the best of *Creed*, the smooth parkour and the arresting locales, the rich tapestry of historical tourism and charming character-driven yarns. More than anything, *Origins* proves that there is still plenty of room for great experiences in this often unfairly derided franchise. And finally, Ubisoft is focusing more on its worlds and less on the formulaic recreation of its tried and tested collect-a-thon tropes. The result is essential. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Egypt and star Bayek make this a promising forebear to an new age of *Creed*.

9



PUBLISHER BETHESDA / DEVELOPER TANGO GAMEWORKS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £49.99

The Evil Within 2

HELL AND SEBASTIAN DOM PEPIATT

The single most impressive thing about *The Evil Within 2* is how it manages to make an effective horror experience

without compromising player freedom. Think of some of the most nerve-racking experiences: *Alien: Isolation* and *Resident Evil 7* keep the player confined to a path, pretty much, dictating when and where the scares will hit by locking the camera and guiding you to uneasy beats.

The Evil Within 2 forgoes all that. It opens its demented world up to you

pretty early on, almost intentionally, and seemingly smirking as it does so. Tango Gameworks knows its first game suffered from pacing issues and weird boss fights that broke you out of your immersion, and there's a very sly, underlying knowingness to *The Evil Within 2* that sort of refers to that. A lot of protagonist Sebastian's flashbacks to the first game are dealt with in a sort-of exasperated way, and even your ever-present guide, Kidman, laughs off the past and basically says 'well, it's better this time' as you start exploring the new world.

And it is. Set three years after the first game's admittedly bizarre murder investigation, Sebastian Castellanos is brought back into clandestine agency Mobius and thrown against his will into the psychic plane of the STEM world. This world is effectively a physical manifestation of people's memories, but something sinister is afoot and his once-presumed dead daughter Lily seems to be present.

The story certainly isn't going to win any awards for originality – it's all

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A survival horror sequel from the mind behind *Resident Evil* and *Dino Crisis*.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A through-the-looking-glass tale of madness combined with Cronenberg's most bizarre films.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Fans of horror games, Anne Rice novels, *American Horror Story* and gore.

of the worst thriller clichés smushed together into one Cronenberg-esque mutant of a narrative. But it's a functional story, for sure, and one that actually keeps you engaged as you explore more of the game's fractal hub town, Union. The characters' performances are equally as sketchy, but to be honest that kind of works in the game's favour: it gives it a B-movie flavour that works really well alongside the visual and narrative setup of the game, too.

Weird world

That B-movie feeling steps up when you start exploring just how weird the STEM world can get. Because it exists purely within the mind, it gives the developer carte blanche to go mad with mechanics: Tango plays with time continuums, flashbacks, camera trickery – even your own orientation. It lets you breathe in the open world but then really starts to mess with you in scripted main missions, to the degree you feel as lost, frightened, confused and vulnerable as Sebastian himself.



In Japan, this game rocks the far superior title *Psycho Break 2*



LEFT The way the game plays with time and imagery is a strong theme, and one that often sets up some particularly tense and awful moments.

The Evil Within 2 plays with player expectation and subverts it in the same way *Arkham Knight* did – it's amazing what a few little camera tricks can do to make you feel completely lost within a game. It's a brave move, and it suits *The Evil Within 2* very well. Combine this with some truly horrific monster designs that often take you off-guard, and you've got a game that celebrates all the best tenets of a thriller movie, as well as a body-horror masterpiece. It's an impressive combination.

Unfortunately, all of this is slightly offset by the game's combat (which is a crux of the core gameplay). It's certainly improved from the original, but it still feels a bit too heavy and meaty – occasionally unresponsive. Part of it intentional – you're a cop, not a marine, after all – but that only goes so far when you're trying to line up a melee attack and it feels like aiming through syrup.

Ammo is as scarce as you'd expect in a game like this, making stealth and crafting vital if you want to survive. The crafting system is a nice touch, especially since it bolsters the risk/reward of exploring the well-crafted open world. It also pushes you into areas you'd otherwise perhaps avoid, or have little interest exploring were it not for that gold glint that belies an ammo pouch upgrade, or similar. The stealth, however, is problematic – sight cones are inconsistent and controls are heavy, making some stealth sections frustrating and feel longer than they should.

FAR LEFT Sometimes you become so disoriented you have no idea how to escape.

RIGHT Thanks to protagonist Sebastian's now-enriched backstory, you find yourself associating with him more deeply.

SOME EVIL WITHOUT?

Thanks to the lengthy exposition dumps and generally detached storytelling of the sequel, *The Evil Within 2* is pretty forgiving to players that haven't played the first game. You can pretty much jump straight into this game without even touching the first one (and it's much better, so you should). There are flashback sequences and collectible files you can read that catch you up on the last story, all in-game, so if you're keen for a horror experience, don't be put off by the big '2' in the title.



Goo feeling

The RPG system in the game (which boil down to collecting green goo and red goo to upgrade your kit and 'abilities') also offers another level of progression, but sometimes feels like a compromise to the survival horror aspect of the game: yes, it gives you bonus objectives to seek out in your downtime, but it also feels like you can overpower Seb a little too early, offsetting that survivalist element Shinji Mikami games usually do so well. At least bosses can still one-shot you, though, for better or worse.

The Evil Within 2 excels at delivering an experience that celebrates the grotesque, that pushes you forward through an open world of horror and tension without compromising too much of that core survival experience.

The game certainly feels more progressive than its predecessor, but because of that it also feels less pure – but we think that's a good thing. It's a fusion of genres that offers an engaging story with a well-thought world and some sometimes dodgy, sometimes on-point mechanics. We wouldn't enjoy a Mikami game any other way. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

A gripping, well-told horror story held back by occasionally awkward handling.

8

It's actually pronounced as in elixir, not as in election

PUBLISHER THQ NORDIC / DEVELOPER PIRANHA BYTES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £40

Elex

THE RPG MELTING POT MARTIN KITTS

A world of ogre-slaying knights will usually suffice for an RPG backdrop. If not there's always the shiny jetpacks and laser guns sci-fi route, or the dusty post-apocalyptic wasteland scenario. Or you could try cramming absolutely everything into one enormous game...

Elex certainly isn't short of ambition. Amid the ruined truckstops and incongruously well-preserved car wrecks of the planet Magalan, four factions have quartered the world into the four classic videogame settings: forest, fire, desert and ice.

They're fighting for control of the eponymous Elex, a kind of magical element brought by a comet that long ago devastated Magalan and gave rise to a new world order. At the top of the food chain are the Albs, a high-tech militaristic society from the frozen north, and the Clerics, who build robots and live in volcanoes. Scrabbling around at the bottom we have a band of desert-dwelling scavengers, the Outlaws, and some technology-shunning forest people, the Berserkers, who wear fantasy armour, fight with swords and look like they belong in a different game.

You play a disgraced Alb commander who survives a botched execution, loses his Elex-given powers and is forced to start again at the lowest rung of the ladder, joining forces with the Berserkers. Or any group you want, supposedly, although you'll have a hard time getting anywhere beyond the opening area

RIGHT Scouting the desert territory of the Outlaws. Here be minefields.

BELOW Ask a silly question, get another question instead of an answer.



short cut

WHAT IS IT?
Genre-blending post-apocalyptic sci-fi magic fantasy RPG.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Very much along the lines of Bethesda's big guns, without the big budget.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Fans of the developer's previous series, *Risen*, will know what to expect.

"The combat is probably the single worst flaw, slow and clumsy"

without making that initial Berserker alliance. Magalan is crawling with creatures that will instantly complete the job the Albs and their super powerful weapons failed to do.

While it does sound like a recipe for a unique and epic adventure, it's simply not put together very well at all. The story is confusing, the writing and acting are poor, the animation is shoddy, the combat is clunky, and it's riddled with glitches. It's a blockbuster concept on a straight-to-cable budget.

Jaw-jaw not war-war

There are loads of dialogue options that never seem to get narrowed down as you move through a conversation. Sometimes there doesn't appear to be an appropriate response to a question from a character, only a long list of more questions from which you'll have to select every possible line in order to move a quest to the next stage.

We can put up with small glitches like floating characters and lip sync that suddenly cuts out in the middle of a speech – *Fallout* and *The Elder*

Scrolls are both notorious for this sort of thing, so it almost gives the game an authentic Bethesda look – but there are bigger annoyances such as various pages in the menu screen randomly freezing the game for about 20 seconds.

The combat is dreadful, and given the amount of it you'll have to do, this is probably the single worst flaw. It's slow and clumsy, limited by dubious collision detection and a stamina bar that means you'll often waste energy on hits that look like they should have connected. It makes exploration hard work, and we suffered plenty of deaths from the attritional effects of slipping off small ledges while clambering around trying to avoid yet another horrible fight.

If you can tolerate the shoddiness there's a lot of game in *Elex*, but for our money it demands far more from the player than it ever gives back. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
A wildly ambitious fantasy fighter that's sadly lacking the fundamentals.

6



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XBOX ONE

This is lead DLC character Kurt Angle's first WWE game in 11 years, having last appeared in *SmackDown Vs Raw 2007*

PUBLISHER 2K GAMES / DEVELOPER YUKE'S/VISUAL CONCEPTS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £44.99

WWE 2K18

MOSTLY FANTASTIC, BUT GLITCHES WILL LEAVE YOU STONE COLD **BEN WILSON**



Since its 2014 switch from 360 to Xbox One, 2K's officially branded spandex-'n'-slams series has been

synonymous with two things. Surgical attention to detail when it comes to making the videogame play like 'real' choreographed WWE... and, with regards to pre-release playtesting, the polar opposite. For the third year running, this franchise entry launches with more frustrating bugs than there are wrestlers in a Royal Rumble.

An entire review could be filled with these gremlins, but we'll try to cover the key ones in a paragraph. Universe mode, in which you create your own shows and feuds, hamstrung by random crashes and the AI replacing matches with undeletable wrestler promos. Last Man Standing bouts in which the required prompt for you to regain your feet never appears, and

so you lose in seconds. Promos where the important 'taunt' button does nothing. Referees sometimes refusing to count. And so on.

Figure-eight leglock

Those who've peeked at the score are entitled to wonder how all of this can still add up to an 8/10 game. Therein lies the Jekyll-and-Hyde experience that is *WWE 2K18*: when it comes to the in-ring action, it's an exceptional grap sim. Smartly meshing the competitive elements of a real fighter with wrestling's pantomime touches, the end result is a game where 80% of your satisfaction comes from winning; the other 20% from merely putting on an entertaining show.

That surgical attention to detail is critical to this. Accurate faces, entrances and other cosmetic touches are all included, but it's more subtle flourishes that lend a just-like-watching-*Raw* feel. Such

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

The official videogame of the sole 'rasslin' fed that even your mum and dad have heard of.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Unmatched in the genre for pure wrestling ability... and maddening glitches.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Those who can tell Bray Wyatt from Braun Strowman without needing Google Image Search.

as an opponent subtly repositioning themselves on the mat in order to take a top-rope move as you ascend the turnbuckles; squash matches, where a bout can be over in seconds if a vastly superior grappler takes advantage of an early momentum boost; and a neat new carry system from which you can transition into moves or launch a foe into interactive scenery, such as the ring posts.

The biggest changes apply to tag-team contests, and that's good news; these were a weak point, often lasting forever as your clueless teammates failed to prevent opposition counterparts breaking up pins. Now, wear a foe down sufficiently and he or she will roll to the arena floor after 'hot tagging' out, giving you a short window in which to pummel and defeat the surviving partner.

Related, and welcome, is the call to expand tag matches to eight men, should you wish. Yet while four-on-

“The menu for building your own shows is wonderfully user-friendly”

RIGHT Power Rankings within Universe are a tidy new feature that enables you to quickly see who's hot and who's the next Curt Hawkins.



FAR LEFT Women's matches are at long last on par with the men's, making Sasha Banks vs Bayley worth constant revisiting.

LEFT Cruiserweight show 205 Live debutants include Akira Tozawa and TJP, and there's also a return for The Brian Kendrick.

four slugfests should be a highlight, they come at a price: crippling lag. Timing-based mechanics such as reversals and kickouts too often become a lottery, and the stuttering can be a quite-literal headache. This issue, like the others, is likely to be patched at some point; until then the match type is an occasional diversion rather than a constant must-play.

The big shows

2K18 divides its long-haul modes depending on whether you want sustained play as actual WWE superstars, or a pretend-o-version of yourself. The most development effort has gone into the latter, aka MyPlayer, which itself is split into two hand-in-glove options: MyCareer and Road To Glory. The first is predominantly offline, the second mainly online, both with the same principles: win matches to unlock virtual currency to improve your created bruiser.

BEST ROSTER EVER

Packing over 200 wrestlers once you factor in duplicate gimmicks (eg Mankind/Dude Love/Mick Foley), *WWE 2K18*'s roster is the greatest ever seen in a game of its type. Numerous playable legends offer a likeable nod to the old WWF, while the contemporary list stretches to NXT names casual fans won't know, such as TM-61, Authors Of Pain, Sanity and No Way Jose. A wealth of creation options enable you to flesh this mass out further.

MyCareer is significantly improved this year by a more streamlined story, with specific goals that must be met to advance – yet it maintains a degree of freedom via the ability to roam backstage and talk to other wrestlers and authority figures. While everyone can have fun with that, the same won't be true of Road To Glory thanks to the decision to hide unlockables, such as hairstyles, clothing and other accessories, behind lootboxes.

Divisive as Road To Glory may be, there's no debating that the mode in which you play as existing wrestlers, Universe, is brilliant – when those glitches aren't raising their ugly heads. The menu for building your own shows and feuds is wonderfully user-friendly, with the engine now generating potential future rivalries for you while active ones play out. Like the look of any potential rivalry and by pairing wrestlers against one

another, you can trigger cut-scenes which develop it further.

Universe is so good that without those bugs it'd cause 2K18 to threaten 9/10 territory; but they simply cannot be ignored having become a permanent launch characteristic of Yuke's otherwise excellent series. This really is a true-to-life interpretation of Vince McMahon's WWE. Right down to occasionally feeling like you've been superkicked in the skull. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

The actual wrestling is superb – but its teething problems must be patched quickly.

8

Seek out *AER*'s fauna for a major dose of cuteness (and achievements)

PUBLISHER DAEDALIC ENTERTAINMENT / DEVELOPER FORGOTTEN KEY / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £13.49

AER – Memories Of Old

HIGH-FLYING EXPLORATION IN A WORLD OF FORGOTTEN GODS ZOE DELAHUNTY-LIGHT

As soon as we flap our wings, the simplicity of our quest suddenly makes sense. Find the temple. Solve the puzzle. Move onto the next. You'd think that the last section would be a chore. Actually, it's an utter joy. See, there's no horse to cajole into a gallop, or even a glider to hang from. To get from one island to the next, we just turn into a bird.

Set in a land where gods have been forgotten and a threat called the Void has begun to wake, *AER*'s main selling point isn't the story. Instead it's Auk. She's our eyes into the world and is able to transform into a mystic hawk-like creature, using her feathered shape to complete her pilgrimage. But things don't go exactly to plan...

When things inevitably start to go wrong and the Void awakens, there are three temples we seek out to find guidance. To get there we're given simple directions and have to solve a puzzle to reveal the path to our destination. It's very much a good thing that the journeying to the temples is easy as there's this exuberant, dizzying glee that comes from flying at full speed or circling over an island to scout it out. Even better is the beacon of light that guides you to your next location, visible from the horizon and a good excuse to do a bit of exploring now that you know you're near.

Unfortunately, the puzzles that await us in each temple don't reach the same soaring heights. Instead

RIGHT Glide peacefully over islands or flap your wings to speed up: how you traverse *AER*'s landscape is up to you.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

Part flying simulation, part exploration, with a few puzzles thrown in for good measure.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Bewitching when soaring through the air but a little too easy and over far too fast.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Someone who wants to relax for a while, lovingly staring at the pleasant scenery around them.



“Understanding where we fit into everything is confusing”

of being challenging brainteasers, they're straightforward and, consequently, a little dull. However, they will make you explore every last inch of the temples to find the next section to solve, which makes you collide with the transparent phantoms that tell *AER*'s backstory. These frozen tableaux flesh out the history of the land, adding the perspective of ordinary people to this tale of gods, spirits and shapeshifters. This goes a long way to making us care about the world and the ruins we explore.

High and flighty

Even though *AER* perfectly embodies what it must feel like to soar among the clouds, when it comes to the lore and story you're embroiled in everything it gets quite... bewildering. Gods, spirit animals, priestesses, the God King, the Creator, the Dreamer, as well as the confusing Caretaker concept – we find it difficult to grasp exactly what each one's function is. As a result, understanding where we fit into everything is confusing,

especially as at every opportunity characters decided to lecture us on ancient history and their past.

Yet *AER*'s biggest disappointment is that after the puzzles, the exploration, and the mystical gods we meet, we're faced with a sudden ending. There's no final complex puzzle, no great revelation. The screen simply cuts to black after a bit of jumping and one final cutscene. While some could construe this as intentional ambiguity, *AER* cheats itself out of a finale that could have been a fitting culmination of all the flying and exploration skills we built up over the course of playing.

It's a shame, as if you skip on the exploration and just follow the story you only have about three hours' worth of play. *AER*'s world is so beautiful that we'd happily take more. For now we'll have to content ourselves with staring at the birds wheeling through the sky. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT
A beautiful but unchallenging exploration game that's a little on the brief side.

7





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Morphite is brought to you by the mobile app specialists who made *2-Bit Cowboy*

PUBLISHER BLOWFISH STUDIOS / DEVELOPER CRESCENT MOON GAMES / WE'RE FIVE GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £11.99

Morphite

JUST ANOTHER BUG HUNT? MARTIN KITTS

Cataloguing a randomly generated galaxy of pastel-shaded planets filled with bizarre lifeforms: it certainly looks and sounds similar to *No Man's Sky*, but in terms of gameplay this is closer to a relaxing take on *Metroid Prime*.

Barring a couple of decidedly ropery space-based minigames, *Morphite* is played entirely from a first-person perspective. Traversing the galaxy is simply a matter of picking a star system from a 2D map, and the ultimate objective is to locate special crystals that grant new abilities and weapons, required in order to unlock doors and progress a little bit further through the game.

Following the story will net you five or six hours of platform-puzzle gameplay, but it's possible to head off into the brightly coloured yonder at any point to see what the game's random planet algorithm will serve up. Star systems generally have a space station where you can refuel and two or three landable worlds where you'll find all sorts of alien strangeness, presented in an endearing low-polygon style. Scanning the wildlife earns data that can be sold for cash, and you'll also find mineral deposits that can be shot to reveal various resources required for upgrades.

Not so smooth

Morphite is also available on smartphones, and its overall level of polish befits something you'd find lurking in an app store. There

RIGHT Despite the simplicity of the untextured graphics, the framerate frequently shudders.

BELOW There's no denying it's an interesting looking game at times.



short cut

WHAT IS IT? First-person adventure with mostly optional planetary exploration elements.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? *Metroid Prime* meets *No Man's Sky* via the Android app store.

WHO'S IT FOR? Quirky, undemanding fans of quirky, undemanding (and untested) games.

"For all its numerous flaws, Morphite is strangely likeable"

are minor annoyances such as the weapon select system not working correctly when certain items are equipped, and sometimes your dropship will fall clean through the terrain. In the story missions, walking past certain points will cause events to be triggered out of sequence, leading to some odd bits of dialogue such as your robot cat companion warning you to look out for enemies you've already killed. More seriously, key items sometimes vanish from the world or will deactivate as soon as you place them, and the only way around this is to restart the level.

Some bugs are actually kind of helpful. For example, scanning fast animals that keep running away can be tricky, but you'll eventually catch them when they get wedged in the scenery. And while in many games a boss battle can mean a big difficulty spike, in *Morphite* most of them glitched out immediately, allowing an easy victory. The aptly named Junk Beast just stood in a corner, throwing rocks at the wall while we shot it in

the face. Then there was a flying robot guardian that froze obligingly in mid-air until we'd finished killing it...

For all its numerous flaws, *Morphite* is strangely likeable. Its glitches tend to be more amusing than they are frustrating, and simply ambling around its shoddy cartoon universe has an addictive 'one more planet' sort of appeal. While the likes of *Elite Dangerous* spend years teasing us with the promise of some day being able to explore something that isn't just a hyper-realistic potholed beige rock, *Morphite* serves up a wide variety of atmospheric, characterful mini-worlds. You'll spend some of your time falling through polygons and trying to navigate back to the dropship through the pea-souper of a fog cloud that obscures the game's tiny draw distance, but if you can embrace the cheapness you might just get your money's worth. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Far from great, with a fair few bugs, *Morphite* is enjoyably shabby all the same.

6





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PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT SAN FRANCISCO / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £49.99

South Park: The Fractured But Whole

SNIFFING OUT A PLACE IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY DAVE MEIKLEHAM

Are you easily offended? Then slowly back away from this review. Ubisoft's companion piece to the Cartoon

Central phenomenon is utterly obscene. This 2.5D RPG is so filthy, we can't begin to even vaguely describe 75% of its depraved gags. This is a family mag, after all. Of course, if you dig the deliberately gross-out, yet endearingly bizarre humour Trey Parker and Matt Stone have built their seminal adult animation around, you wouldn't have it any other way.

Conversely, if you're the type of gamer who thinks *GTA* often takes things too far with its occasionally crass brand of satire, *South Park: The Fractured But Whole* will undoubtedly offend more than it excites. Don't fret, we won't upset you by elaborating on the X-rated scribbles that await your eyes upon opening Cartman's journal. We'll skip the specifics of your created character's first trip to the town church's basement. And we most

certainly won't besmirch your soul by letting loose on the grotty details that surround an early, twerk-tastic trip to the Peppermint Hippo stripclub.

If you're still reading, congrats! It means that A) you have no problem stomaching a constant conveyor belt of lurid jokes, and B) you're going to be treated to a surprisingly tactical, ultimately charming role-player. Don't let the fact that Cartman and co are obsessed with fart jokes throw you. Underneath the stinky exterior lies an RPG with a combat system that's grown up a lot since predecessor *The Stick Of Truth* so lovingly lampooned *Lord Of The Rings* back in 2014.

Do the Cartman

This time out, the kids of the ultra crude Colorado town have decided to ditch Gandalf and pals in favour of embracing an epic superhero fantasy. As such, Cartman reprises his role as The Coon: a Batman-inspired vigilante who's reportedly the offspring "of a space raccoon and a try-anything-once animal control

short cut

WHAT IS IT?

A crass, crude yet somehow clever RPG spin on *South Park*.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

The Stick Of Truth, only with capes instead of wizard caps.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Cartman fans, and those who appreciate tactical scraps.

officer". Other characters also take on Marvel-mimicking alter egos; be it Kyle dressing up as the Human Kite, Scott Malkinson working himself into Bane-esque bouts of bulky fury as Captain Diabetes, or Jimmy transforming into the Flash-like Fastpass.

The plot initially centres around finding a lost cat, but quickly balloons, eventually encompassing everything from mob wars, sinister ninja conspiracies, to fights with talking bags of weed. As the New Kid, you help Cartman and chums solve crimes around town, the game constantly dropping funnies aimed at the Marvel Cinematic Universe along the way. The children's obsession with kickstarting an Avengers-esque franchise is cutely framed, and though not every gag lands, *The Fractured But Whole* sweetly realises the wide-eyed, delusional sort of fantasies that comes from kids playing superhero.

In order to effectively showcase the children's imaginary powers, Ubisoft San Francisco has radically

Comedy Central aired an episode of the show called 'Franchise Prequel' to set up the game's premise



LEFT Some of the game's biggest battles pit you against Stan's Freedom Pals.

“Involving fights reward diligent planning and keen space management”

expanded and improved on the battle system introduced by Obsidian in *SoT*. Whereas the last game used a simple turn-based system, fights in the sequel deploy a strategic grid that forces you to constantly think about your team's position. Moving New Kid and allies around in combat is kind of like a game of chess... only with less rooks and more devastating ass-gas attacks.

Fart-stopper

The key to winning fights is picking a team and set of powers that complement each other. Different moves have varying reach, so pairing the diagonal drill attacks of Stan's Toolshed hero with the long-range pouncing lunges of The Coon can help you target foes all over the grid as turns roll by. It's an involving system, and one which rewards diligent planning and space management without ever getting too overwhelming. The fact you can switch up New Kid's attacks between encounters by mixing and matching attacks from different class types – like speedster, psychic and the extra toasty blaster preset – also stops combat from becoming overly samey. Though not much can be done about the smell.

FAR LEFT Bosses mix up fights by adding respawning foes. Screw you, Butters.

RIGHT Despite Cartman's comments, the race slider doesn't alter combat difficulty.

SNAP HAPPY

While it's not exactly a biting commentary on modern society's obsession with appearance, there's a fun little side plot in the game that sees the New Kid chasing down followers on the imaginably titled 'Coonstagram' app. In order to take on early missions, you must first build up followers by snapping selfies with South Park residents. Do yourself a favour and get one with Morgan Freeman down at the local taco joint.



As you explore the streets of the snowy burg, New Kid frequently gets to exercise his... um, 'unique' bowel movements. Or, in layman's terms, he farts a whole bunch. Not that these are regular passages of wind, you understand. Instead, New Kid's gas-releasing powers are so explosive, you can literally bend the space-time continuum whenever you let one rip. That's hardly a surprise, considering this is a show that based an entire episode around a plotline where the townspeople pooped out of their mouths.

How do these farting frolics affect gameplay? In combat you can slow down time to score free hits on enemies, or cause a distortion that skips over the enemy team's turn. Additionally, these nose-nerfing abilities have their uses while roaming around town; say, by letting you skip over electrified pools of water, or running past six graders who are jonesing for a scrap.

Your mileage with the game will likely boil down to whether you see fart jokes as puerile, or lighthearted silliness. Yet even as lapsed fans, we think there are enough slyly subversive gags here to keep casual watchers and hardcore boxset hoarders happy. As a *South Park* experience, *The Fractured But Whole* is both funny and an expertly animated take on the crudely drawn cartoon. It's also a cracking little RPG that deserves serious credit for its clever combat. ■



XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

A winning tribute to TV's crassest kids, wrapped up in a fresh and fun RPG shell.

8

Rugby 18's loading screens contain rugby trivia that might be more fun than the actual game

PUBLISHER EKO SOFTWARE / DEVELOPER BIGBEN INTERACTIVE / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW / COST £39.99

Rugby 18

HAPLESS OVAL-BALL SIM ONLY FOR THE DESPERATE OR DEDICATED **MATT ELLIOTT**

Rugby is a complicated game. There's loads going on that nobody ever sees – even referees don't seem to understand the rules. But even then, it's shocking that we've gone so long without a tolerable rugby tie-in, if indeed there's ever been one. Sadly, *Rugby 18* fails to break this cycle. And even in the moments where it succeeds as a rugby game, it's horribly basic compared to big-budget competitors such as *FIFA*, *NBA* and *Madden*.

Rugby 18 doesn't start well. Tutorials are revealed as you play, which is standard for most games, but it works badly here. You'll quickly become acquainted with how rucking works... and very little else. You can play six entire matches without ever learning how lineouts work, for example, and if you're not familiar with the sport, the basic instructions will leave you lost. Don't know the difference between and up-and-under and a grubber? Good luck.

The result can be an endless pile-in of directionless rucking – similar to the real thing, then, but not always fun. This is partly a criticism of rugby as a sport as much as it is *Rugby 18* – we watch it like lawyers, arguing over technicalities – but better presentation would have helped. The actual controls are buried in a hidden menu screen you can only access when you're not playing. It's a poor start, which reflects the leaden presentation throughout the game.



RIGHT Kicking is actually pretty decent – you can try to adjust if you aim incorrectly, but it's satisfyingly tough.

BELOW Character models are decent – Dan Cole has the look of a man who's used his face as a weapon.



short cut

WHAT IS IT? Wobbly Rugby Union simulator featuring club and international sides. But not all of them.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? Taking a crash ball into contact – occasionally exhilarating, mostly painful.

WHO'S IT FOR? Hardcore rugby fans. Anyone with a passing interest will be lost.

“You can play six matches without ever learning how lineouts work”

Once you've learned the rules, things improve. There are moments where you'll feel like you're on the pitch, making decisions, stretching defences. When you're sending forwards crashing over the gain line and making sniping runs with your scrum half, it feels great. And there's a palpable sense of relief in clearing your lines when the opposing team is camped in your 22. But there's a lack of nuance that means the joy of this can only last so long. There are no set plays, and many technical aspects of the game feel reductive. There's no competitive thrill in scrums and mauls, for example. Even the very basic stuff, like passing the ball back to your fly-half, feels slightly off – players move too quickly and kicks take too long. It should be hard, obviously; but it shouldn't be impossible.

Strange selection

The club sides are well represented, although Super Rugby is absent. Internationally, it's more of a mixed bag: most of the top sides are there,

but there are some strange absences, such as Ireland, Japan, Samoa and Tonga. This is representative of the game as a whole: it gets some bits right, but the lasting impression is one of frailty and incompleteness. It's a shame – find a friend who loves rugby, and there are moments that feel like you're shouting on the terrace, a plastic pint of cold cider in your hand. But you have to push past the game's inadequacies to get there.

In a world where there's even a bullfighting game – *bullfighting!* – it's frustrating that rugby feels as carelessly handled as other niche sports. There's the core of a decent game here, but it's presented with no finesse. And more than this, it can be so repetitive and attritional that it just isn't fun. There are moments that mechanically feel like a rugby game. The next step is actually making them enjoyable. Godspeed, *Rugby 19*. ■

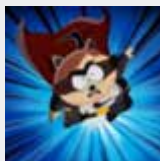


XBOX
THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

OXM VERDICT

Does a few good things, but is horribly basic compared to other big sporting titles.

5



HEROES
YOU
DESERVE

WIN!



South Park: The Fractured But Whole
on Xbox One PLUS Ubisoft Mysterion
Collectible and exclusive cap

Take a walk on the heroic (but also incredibly NSFW) side in this RPG adventure featuring the famously foul-mouthed kids.

South Park games are unique. Yes, they're rude, crude, and in some cases just outright offensive. Somehow, though, they also manage to pack in some surprisingly fun game mechanics and deep systems to create a title that has you laughing, cringing, and coming back for more over and over again.

The Fractured But Whole places you back in the role as New Kid in an all-new adventure. Cartman's heroic alter ego is on a mission from the future, and it's up to you and the rest of the *South Park* cast to help him find a missing cat... and save the world.

To celebrate the launch of *South Park: The Fractured But Whole*, we're giving away a copy of the game for Xbox One, and some Ubisoft collectibles for you to stare at and/or wear while you're playing. To be in with a chance of winning this epic bundle of fun, simply answer the question below... ■

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A SUPER CART-MAN **B** THE COON **C** CAPTAIN AWESOME

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TERMS & CONDITIONS

The competition closes on 15 December 2017. By taking part, you agree to be bound by the competition rules: futureplc.com/competition-rules. Entries must be received by midnight on 15 December 2017 (UK time). Open to UK residents aged 18 years and over. There will be one winner, entitled to a copy of *South Park: The Fractured But Whole*, a South Park Mysterion Ubi Collectible, and a South Park cap. The prize is non-transferable and non-refundable. There is no cash alternative.

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extra

Get more from your Xbox





Is the wait for *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* on Xbox One slowly killing you? Can't bear to wait another few months to get involved in some battle royale-based action? Then take a gander at what we've been playing this month as we try out **Fortnite** (p98) to see what the fuss is all about and attempt to keep our urges in check. Next up we're taking a look back at our younger years – and that time we went on a gap year, got involved with the wrong crowd on a secluded island and ended up murdering loads of people... Though maybe the drugs made us a bit hazy – was that real or was it just that time we played **Far Cry 3** (p102) for four days straight without sleep? We're not sure, but we've got a great wallet made of badgers as a souvenir. Many games have tried to feel more like TV or film both by using techniques such as episodic pacing, and through ambience and style. We write about why we love **LA Noire** (p106) and how it gets the feeling of being in an old movie perfectly. Finally it's time to get down and practise those dance moves. It's the start of the festive season and the Xbox One X has now officially launched so we're celebrating with a list of **the greatest parties in Xbox history** (p108). Even if large gatherings aren't your thing, you can still have a one-on-one party with some of the great games featured here.



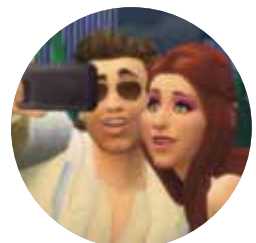
098



102



106



108

097



Keep an eye out for this badge over the next few pages: it indicates when a game of old can be booted up in shiny Xbox One-o-vision.

→ CHECK OUT OUR VAST LIBRARY OF XBOX FEATURES AT WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM



You won't need to spend a Fortnite in **Battle Royale** to realise this online shooter is more than just a PUBG clone **DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN**

PUBLISHER EPIC GAMES / DEVELOPER EPIC GAMES/PEOPLE CAN FLY / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



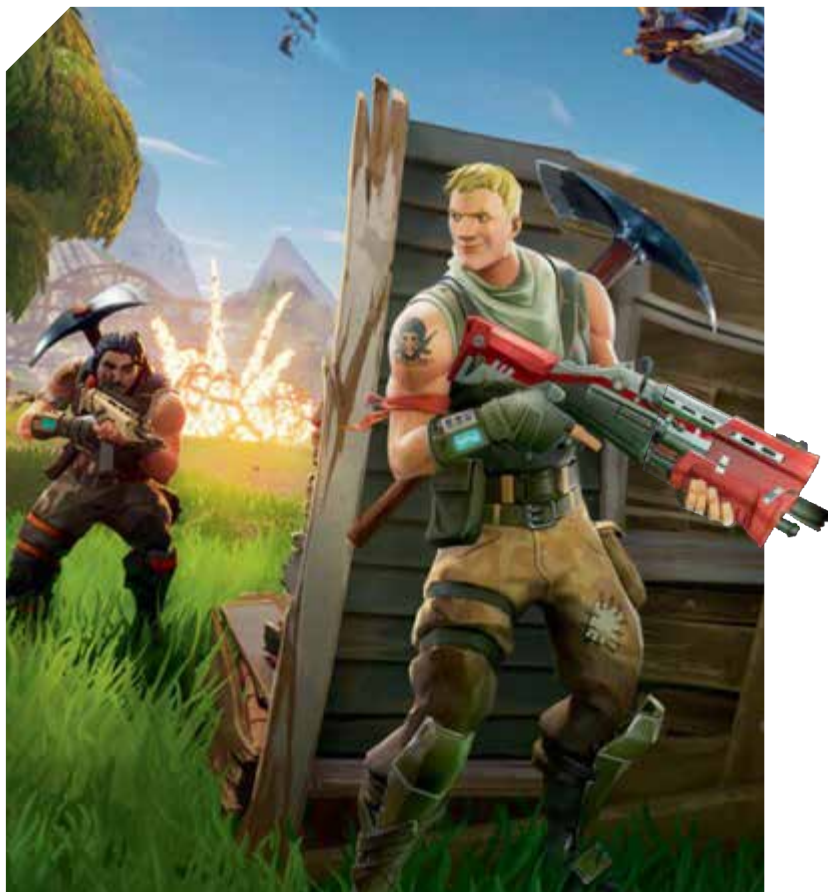
Having spent an ungodly amount of time in *Fortnite's* main, shelter-building, zombie-bashing mode, it's a bit of a shock

leaping into its new standalone (and free-to-play) *Battle Royale* spin-off. It's also difficult to miss just how hard Epic Games has tried to use its assets to make something that fits the whole 'one life scramble for gear in a shrinking map' setup that's made *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* such a megahit.

During my first few minutes in the game, it seems like I really am getting a proper carbon copy. Players congregating in an explorable pre-game lobby, leaping about the place, swinging pickaxes at thin air. The chat hasn't reached the choking toxicity of *PUBG*, but it's certainly trying to match it for sheer noise. Then I'm bundled into a school bus hanging from a hot air balloon before freefalling in real-time to the map below. Oh, this is all getting awkwardly familiar, isn't it?

When I touch down it's a mad scramble towards the nearest urban structure. I've landed (using a parachute-esque glider, naturally) outside a quaint little cottage, but I know its contents might not be so idyllic. Pickaxe slung tentatively over my shoulder, I open the door and swing round the corner, ready for the inevitable trap. There's no one there save a glowing assault rifle and a pile of ammo. I've hit the motherload! Grabbing my weapons with joyful glee I head upstairs and discover a chest full of more ammo and resources. Resources? In a battle royale game? What fresh madness is this?

This is where Epic Games pulls out *Fortnite's* trump card. It could have just stripped *Battle Royale* to its barest bones, leaving in just the procedurally-generated maps, scattered weapons and basic third-person shooter mechanics, but instead it drops the more-ish crafting system that makes the full-fat version of the game so



addictive. I *could* race out of the house and make my way to the next bunch of abodes, but there's a good chance someone will pop me with a sniper rifle from afar or ambush me with a shotty. Nope, it's time to get building.

Royale affair

By keeping *Fortnite's* most important feature intact (at least, on a slightly smaller scale), *Battle Royale* retains its similarities to *PUBG* on a surface level only. Now, with the power of my trusty pickaxe and the magic of some rather handy blueprints, I can do far more than trade bullets. Say I want to reach the top floor of a house, but I know the ground floor has been filled with traps by other players. I'll just craft a ramp to the top! Need to safely cross a river

in a hurry? Build an impromptu bridge, of course!

It's a mechanic that becomes even more important as the storm around the map draws ever closer, forcing all the remaining players into a rapidly shrinking arena of houses, trees and verdant hills. Structures no longer remain trap-filled nightmares or looted shells. Since practically everything can be broken down for resources, you can turn any shack into a certified fortress. During my first few matches, I manage to survive to the final 10 players, but things are just starting to get interesting.

Some players, now in full *PUBG* hunter mode, have geared themselves up to the max and are slowly roaming the map, ready to take out any



unsuspecting foe and loot their corpse for all its worth. Others, however, have embraced their inner architect and turned their chosen structure into a Mad Max-esque outpost. As I tentatively approach the last few players, I construct some impromptu cover at the brow of a hill, and use it to draw out a couple of roving, gun-toting predators. I'm getting good at this.

Thing is, now I'm faced with another challenge – now I've got to stick my *Rainbow Six Siege* hat on and work out how to break into someone's unique take on base building. I don't last very long – especially in the company of such bloodthirsty PVP Fortnites – but for what I've lost in pride and gear at least I've managed to loot plenty of ideas for my own fort next time around.

Wise borrowings

So, as you've probably guessed, *Fortnite Battle Royale* isn't the most original of games, but it least it manages to make most of its borrowed concepts and mechanics work as part of an engaging and rewarding whole. The central base construction system smacks of *Fallout 4*'s own shelter creation – because nothing says 'I built this' like a wooden and brick

“It manages to make most of its borrowed concepts work as part of an engaging whole”

monstrosity in the middle of a lush, green field – while the cartoonish art style is a less than subtle doll of the cap to the likes of *Team Fortress 2*.

Battle Royale works not because of its similarities to *PUBG* and the like, but because it embraces the mechanics that make *Fortnite* such fun. That being said, it's ultimately never going to be as fun or as downright barmy as the game's main PVE mode. Here, with a squad of three friends on chat, *Fortnite* really finds its stride. Now that pickaxe becomes your new best friend.

Now I'm mining resources with pals, crafting ammo on the go and reinforcing a shelter as a group. With an entire ecosystem of zombies that would put *Left 4 Dead*'s undead inhabitants to shame, *Fortnite* should descend into chaos – and it sometimes does, in brilliantly mad ways – but there's nothing quite like a group of people having an impromptu

committee to decide where the spike traps should go or what the floors should be made out of while zombies with beehives for heads are attacking.

Sure, it doesn't hide its influences very well, but *Fortnite* (and *Battle Royale* especially) gets away with it. Whether I'm building lavish shelters while fending off hordes of the undead, or battling far scarier monsters in human form, *Fortnite* is far too enjoyable for its own good. ■

ABOVE *Fortnite*'s visuals might be cutesy, but there's plenty of ultraviolence to be had within its cartoonish confines.

BELOW It's the filing cabinets we feel most sorry for.

WHAT IS IT?

A PVE and PVP third-person shooter with base-building, monster hunting and battle royale-ing galore. Prepare for tense matches.



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Pushing past the horizon in the **Minecraft** **Better Together** update DANIELLA LUCAS

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT / DEVELOPER MOJANG FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE SEPTEMBER 2017



I haven't touched this blocky paradise for a while now, but after the recent update I decided to jump back in.

There was a lot of hype about how much the update would change things, but I was a little dubious about the extent of it. Was it really going to change anything at a fundamental level?

After booting it up and navigating the menu changes I decided to start a new world – a fresh start for a fresh *Minecraft* and I'm surprised by just how different it feels. I've played the Pocket version before, which is the universal version the update is now based on, but it has a completely different dimension to it when played on a TV in your living room. You feel like you're closer to everything you're doing, and even the biomes seem more natural now in the way they integrate with each other.

I also found myself coming across a greater range of creatures more easily. On my second night in my mud shack a baby zombie villager spawned which didn't burn at dawn so I had a challenge on my hands fighting off the speedy little ankle-biter. I even had to readjust how I kitted out my first mud shack – you can now make different coloured beds so you either have to find three of the same coloured sheep before finally crafting somewhere to sleep, or something to make dye with to make all of your wool match.

It's now also super easy to join a server or get an exciting new world that's been prebuilt if you don't fancy taking on a normal survival route. The options open up a whole new level of exploration that's previously been unavailable on consoles. No longer will you struggle with a wonky-looking house, getting frustrated by the worlds you see on YouTube and wondering why yours doesn't look like that – now you can grab a world off of the store to adventure



“No longer will you struggle with a wonky-looking house”

in and use it as a starting point for your own builds.

You'll also want to brush up on your combat skills as there are now more opportunities to go up against your fellow miners on those new servers. These replace the battle and glide maps you could buy in the previous version with approved content creators such as Mineplex, with their own takes on minigames.

Spread the load

It's also super easy to set up your own realm from within the game's launcher, so instead of being limited to when you're online you can essentially set up your own server that you can invite friends to work on even when you're not playing. It does cost extra to do this, but it's cheaper than a Netflix subscription and there are two different options

depending on how many people you want to share it with. I'm seriously tempted to invest in this now with the update – it makes epic builds far more achievable when there are more of you working on them and now they're no longer limited to playing on the same platform or even at the same time.

I've been playing *Minecraft* off and on for years now on various different platforms, but this update makes the game feel entirely new again. It also feels like there's a real buzz of excitement in the community with so much being opened up to average players without the time to invest in building huge worlds. The Better Together update makes it feel like you've finally been invited to join in with all of the cool kids on their modded servers, even though you've never had the means to before. Finally you're a part of something far bigger and brighter than you thought possible. ■

WHAT IS IT?

A mega update to the one of the world's most famous games.



Over 700 cars to collect, but we only have eyes for yesteryear's boxy icons in **Forza Motorsport 7** PHIL IWANIUK

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT / DEVELOPER TURN 10 / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



Perhaps there's something profound or insightful about the way millennials like myself fetishise

the icons of '80s excess like the Ferrari Testarossa and the Lamborghini Countach. It's probably an ironic response to an increasingly consumerist society, or something. All I know is that of all the many unusual, exciting, and legitimately iconic vehicles in *Forza Motorsport 7*, I'm only interested in collecting those produced between 1980 and, oooh, 1998-ish.

That's the draw of a game like this, really. For as long as Turn 10 has been repurposing and refining the *Gran Turismo* blueprint for Xbox pastures, the studio has fundamentally *got* the necessity for a massive car list: it's a means of self-expression, and a way to subvert the usual laws of driving games. Buying the most expensive one (a 2017 Renault F1 car) isn't cool – taking an unusual specimen or forgotten relic and upgrading it until it can cut it with the best is cool.

Naturally then, when *FM7* offers to buy my first car for me depending on the racing series I pick first, I go with a 1987 Porsche 959. These things are worth close to a million pounds today, and Porsche's historic unwillingness to license their vehicles to any videogame franchises means that this is my first chance to drive the virtual version. Its grey, deeply '80s interior is a treat to behold, and while its wild revving and spongy suspension aren't a patch on the torque and stability of modern supercars – well, that's kind of the point.

Old gold

Driving the 959 lights a touch paper in me. Soon I'm watching a 1981 Volkswagen Scirocco gently rotate in the showroom with an almost pornographic fascination, and



"I'm watching a 1981 Volkswagen Scirocco gently rotate with an almost pornographic fascination"

opening and closing the doors of a 1992 Alfa Romeo 155 Q4 in a kind of stupor. And even though I bought one in *Forza Horizon 3* only last year, I'm already lusting after that 1994 McLaren F1, which I remember adorning posters on the bedroom walls of several school friends at the time.

Granted, taking such a specific approach to building a car collection has its drawbacks: I'm spending all my credits on vehicles that all fall under the same category, which isn't expanding my options when it comes to the racing series I can actually compete in. Once you've won the Vintage Supercar Challenge, there's only so much you can do with a garage full of decades-old vehicles. Formula E? Truck racing? IndyCar? Come off it mate, I'm still saving for the McLaren F1's slightly more expensive GT variant. Ah well. There's always multiplayer. No one judges you for owning vehicles you can't get new parts for in multiplayer. They do, however, show a remarkable lack of respect for your 1998 Aston Martin

WHAT IS IT?

Turn 10's latest smorgasbord of racing, with a range of disciplines as diverse as its car list.

V8 Vantage V600's pristine racing green paintwork as they shove past in a Viper adorned in an offensive livery (naturally).

The cold, sad truth about *Forza*'s modern supercars is that they just don't have the character that their '80s and '90s forefathers had. What they gain in braking distances and tractional control systems, they lack in the sheer pupil-dilating terror of trying to wrestle 800hp around Spa-Francorchamps. And one day I'm going to buy that 1.5 million-credit F1 car. Really I am. And the racing trucks too, and the 2018 Porsche 911 GT2 RS, so modern it doesn't exist in reality yet. But if it's all the same to you, I'll finish assembling the great and good from my yellowing back issues of *Auto Trader* before I let go of the past and accept that the days of the Testarossa are over. ■



RETROSPECTIVE

FAR CRY 3





Far Cry 3 was a game that changed the course of Ubisoft's flagship series – but was that course correction for better... or for worse? **DOM PEPIATT**

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT / FORMAT BOX 360

Any game that takes a bunch of young middle-class kids and throws them into a hostile island in the middle of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and teaches them that maybe – maybe – everything they know about life isn't quite what they expected... is a game that's going to get our attention.

When you first boot up *Far Cry 3*, players are met with an epigraph from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*. "In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again." The inclusion of this quote was intentional: it was intended to telegraph to players that protagonist Jason Brody's journey was about to get *surreal*.

And *Far Cry 3* lives up to that promise. On the surface, it's a game about a 25-year-old Caucasian male – from Hollywood, Los Angeles – taking a once-in-a-lifetime trip to a whole new world to open his mind and expand his horizons. But there are so many more levels to the game that grab you and bring you in, even before you get to play around with *Far Cry*'s exemplary open world mechanics and explore the lush South Pacific realm you'll be calling home over the next 30 hours.

The game is – unapologetically – a fantasy. It's a power trip. It's the story of a rich white kid travelling to a foreign climate, a story about allowing protagonist Jason Brody to enact some of the most ridiculous fiction ever in his own life, and let players see through his eyes. The most provocative trailer for *Far Cry 3* showed the protagonist having sex with a princess named Citra. This happens in front of a crowd of onlookers. "I will lead you to glory!" shouts Jason on climax. 'Step into the insanity' the trailer tells you. Play *Far Cry 3*.

What lies beneath

It's a complex narrative that – on the surface – looks like your standard videogame power trip aimed at a very specific audience of straight, white 20-somethings. But dig a little deeper, and *Far Cry 3* reveals something else to you – a story about white colonialism, a criticism of how videogames let us do what we like to foreign populations with little or no consequences. Depending on which ending you choose to complete in *Far Cry 3*, you can see a variety of videogame tropes challenged. You can (spoilers!) choose to fight the 'save the Princess' trope by *thinking* you've saved the Princess, but actually having the Princess kill you – deceiving you all along for her own nefarious ends.

Far Cry 3 carried on the trend of *Far Cry* games playing with the player, testing them, asking them if they're really paying attention to what's going on. *Far Cry* saw a gung-ho soldier rescue a journalist and give the player open-world freedom like they hadn't

seen before, *Far Cry 2* saw a well-researched, believable and ecological viable African open world, and *Far Cry 3* decided to push that further, by adding one of the most convincing unreliable narrators gaming has ever seen into the mix.

The third game in the series brought a real sense of open-ended interpretation to the series – allowing players to take what they wanted from their experience, rather than swallow a prescribed, pre-established notion of a story that had a defined beginning, middle and end. It offered villains that could be doubted – gave the player freedom to use tigers to attack enemies, die from infectious

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Far Cry 3's story is, according to narrative director Jason VandenBerghe, ten times larger than its predecessors. It set a precedent for the series' narrative-focused future.



ABOVE *Far Cry 3*'s main villain, Vaas Montenegro, is one of the most curious villains in gaming – his self-aware monologues hint at the game's deeper narrative.

→ diseases and complete practically everything with a bow and arrow carved from nothing but the island's native resources... if that's what you wanted to do.

And that's where *Far Cry* has always excelled: it merges the exotic climbs of new lands with the open-world mechanics Ubisoft came to master in the middle of the last generation. With *Far Cry 3*, Ubisoft managed to amalgamate technical proficiency – massive areas, impressive graphics, impeccable sound design – with a narrative that pushed relatively new ground, with a series of tools that made the sandbox so much more than just a *Grand Theft Auto*-esque foray into violence and exploitation. It thought about how AI interacted with its environment, it thought about how local predators and prey could impact the island's ecosystem, and it thought about everything you – the player – might do to take advantage of that.

Earn as you go

One of the most important aspects of *Far Cry 3*'s success was its progression system – for every story mission you completed and for every narrative beat you hit, the game rewarded you mechanically, too. Through skill trees, crafting, weapon upgrades and a general learning curve with the initially overwhelming controls, the game eased you into its world, slowly allowed you to feel more comfortable, eventually letting you basically do what you wanted: live that power fantasy it advertised to you for so long. Become the king of a brave new world, a champion of sex, violence and control.

Some players didn't appreciate this, and instead of seeing the game as a commentary on a series of bad videogame tropes, they just saw the tropes themselves in-game (always



“Even from the setup, you gather this game isn't playing it straight”

a problem when trying to mock something by being something... see also *Deadpool: The Game* and *Duke Nukem Forever*). So, while some celebrate *Far Cry 3* for being a subtle send-up of videogaming's more problematic shooter tropes, others see a game celebrating racism, sexism and misogyny. Are you supposed to believe this story Jason Brody is recounting about his liberation of a mysterious island, where he has all the sex and does all the killing? Or are those well-placed *Alice In Wonderland* quotes suggesting that actually, no, this is all a lie – a fabrication from the mind of a traumatised dudebro that couldn't handle his run-in with some pirates?

The experience, either way, is an important one, and allowed *Far Cry* to continue its conquest of the open-world, first-person shooter genre. It allowed Ubisoft to continue experimenting and iterating in a genre it was quickly coming to dominate (radio towers or not), and allowed for one of the bravest pieces of standalone content of the last decade of gaming see a release: *Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon*.

Blood Dragon was a departure from *Far Cry*'s so-far, so-serious setup. This offshoot of the main series used all the same tools the parent game used – an open-world sandbox viewed in the first person – but applied it to a much more sardonic, thematic project. Mechanically, the game is identical to *Far Cry 3* but that's about where

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The open-world majesty of both parts of the *Far Cry 3* experience may not have been to your tastes, but what other alternatives do you really have?



HIMALAYAN IT ON THICK FAR CRY 4

The sequel expanded on all the best elements of the third game, but toned down the controversial writing just a little.



TAKING A LIBERTY GTA IV

Last gen's first *GTA* game may have been flawed, but it offered one of the most satisfying sandboxes available on the console.



AGENTS OF MAYHEM CRACKDOWN 2

Play this once you've experienced *Far Cry* to remember what open world action games looked like before.



the similarities end. The pseudo-sequel isn't concerned with being a critique of colonialism and violence, or pretending to be a glorification of the white saviour trope, but instead opts to be a pastiche of '80s Saturday morning cartoons – offering a neon-laced combination of nostalgia and bloodlust.

Dumb fun

The game is stupid. It knows it is (presumably). Even from the setup, you gather this game isn't playing it straight: in the 'future' of 2007, most of the world has been ravaged by nuclear blasts. Everything is annihilated. Cyber commando Rex 'Power' Colt is sent on a mission to unroot the despicable commander Sloan and destroy his army of eponymous Blood Dragons – dangerous creatures that can be used to your advantage in the open world of *Blood Dragon*.

The plot has everything – time travel, betrayal, explosive romance, one-line quips, a training montage. The game straight up lampoons the action movies of the '80s and the games they in turn went on to inspire. It has more of a focus on stealth than its parent game, and introduces a few revised mechanics (the bow in *Blood Dragon* is possibly one of the best bows in gaming – notching headshots with that thing is immensely satisfying).

The voice acting is poor, the production values are occasionally sketchy, everything seems to have VHS scanlines running over the top, and it's perfect. It sold amazingly well. It was a complete and intentional sidestep from the direction *Far Cry* had – and would continue to – tread. This new '80s VHS vision of the future' (as Ubisoft put it) was initially



announced on April Fool's Day, leading many to suspect it wasn't real. As more information about the title became available – including a leaked soundtrack made in collaboration with synthwave band Power Glove – people started to get excited.

This was a new taste of *Far Cry*, a new example of what could be built in the still-operational and still impressive Dunia Engine (which translates into Arabic as 'World Engine', by the way). It showed the series was more than a one-trick pony, and little thematic spin-offs could extend the life of its various instalments. Since then, we've had a Yeti-based expansion for *Far Cry 4*, seen an entire *Far Cry* game set in the realms of prehistory, and even aspects of *Blood Dragon*'s trippy setup infiltrate main entries in the series. Ubisoft's weird little experiment did wonders for the series, and thanks to being a budget standalone release, likely got a lot more people interested in the series, too.

The fact *Far Cry 3* sold 4.5 million units in its first year, and went on to sell over 10 million units in the years after its release says a lot about the series' place in the sandbox genre. *Blood Dragon* – as a standalone piece of content – sold over a million copies within months of its release. It remains the fastest-selling downloadable title in Ubisoft's lengthy history. Both games helped propel and establish *Far Cry* as a mainstay in gaming – two different but potent statements from Ubisoft about its place as a publisher and a developer.

'You might know us from *Assassin's Creed*', the games seemed to suggest, 'but that's not all we have to offer.' Ubisoft head Yves Guillemot was very candid about his belief of the open world being the future of gaming, and in taking risks with *Far Cry 3* and *Blood Dragon*, he proved that he was right, and that Ubisoft could be trusted with more than just Assassins and history lessons... it could be trusted evolving an entirely separate genre. ■

TOP The series has travelled far – tropical islands in the South Pacific, the mountains of the Himalayas, African savannahs... but the intimidating future of *Blood Dragon* remains the most memorable environment.

ABOVE *Blood Dragon*'s tone is reflected in its visuals, with plenty of bizarre glowing areas and the odd neon dinosaur.

WHY I LOVE... LA NOIRE'S FICTIONAL INFLUENCES



How other media shaped one of gaming's
best period pieces **SAMUEL ROBERTS**

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR / **DEVELOPER** TEAM BONDI / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / XBOX 360 **RELEASE DATE** MAY 2011



RIGHT This would
be Australian
developer
Team Bondi's
only release.



Crime adventure *LA Noire* is perhaps best remembered for its interrogation sequences, and the extreme ways the protagonist,

Cole Phelps, can fly off the handle when you press the 'doubt' button during an interview. These muddled questioning sequences aside, though, *LA Noire* deserves to be hailed as one of gaming's great period pieces. As it lands on Xbox One, we've got the chance to recall why that is, six-and-a-half years after release.

Whereas Rockstar's *GTA* is set in a stylised, hyperreal version of America, *LA Noire* is sober crime fiction set in the real world. You can't interact with its open-world version of LA like you can with Los Santos: it's much more of a living film set. Its recreation of the city is absurdly detailed, from the era-specific fashion to the lovingly crafted cars. Just as important to creating the game's atmosphere, though, was drawing upon the significant works of noir fiction that preceded it.

Fiction meets reality

Rockstar cited crime authors Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James Ellroy as literary influences on *LA Noire* in a 2011 interview with *EW*. Ellroy in particular stands out to me. In his book *The Black Dahlia*, Ellroy uses the notoriously horrific real-life murder of Elizabeth Short as the foundation for a larger mystery, one that digs into the horrors beneath the glamour of LA during this period. The game also connects that case to its own narrative. Short's killing was among a string of horrendous, unsolved murders during the late '40s, including Jeanne French and Evelyn Winters, both of whom loosely inspire two other cases in *LA Noire*. This is your backdrop in the game: a period of escalating and cruel violence, as well as rising drug trade, in a city that's rapidly expanding around the use of the automobile.

Like in Ellroy's book, a fictional explanation is offered for Short's

LENS FLARE

The Xbox One version of *LA Noire* comes with expanded camera options, but also 4K support on Xbox One X, if you're keen to revisit the game.



"The game feels like a TV show because they literally use TV show actors"

murder, though *LA Noire* has a very different execution and reveal. It's presented as a tense breadcrumb trail around the city, as Phelps seeks out clues leading him to the killer, including Short's social security card. Is it okay to use a real-life murder in this fashion, as a plot device in a detective game? That's ultimately up to the player, but it nonetheless lends *LA Noire* a disturbing weight.

When it comes to cinema, writer and director Brendan McNamara has cited classic noir movies like *The Third Man* and *The Naked City* as influences. Roman Polanski's neo-noir *Chinatown* is another major touchstone, particularly in the game's depiction of corruption across different layers of the city's infrastructure, but also in the soundtrack, which echoes Jerry Goldsmith's mournful score in places.

Returning to Ellroy, Curtis Hanson's outstanding 1997 adaptation of the novel *LA Confidential* is probably what most people recall when playing *LA Noire* for the first time. The slightly dulled colour palette is something the two noticeably share, as well as a similar musical lineage. Even the homicide department's cantankerous Irish captain, James Donnelly, evokes

Ellroy's Dudley Smith creation, played in *LA Confidential* by James Cromwell.

"Ellroy creates complex, human, deeply flawed characters that you come to love," McNamara said in 2011. This is one element of Ellroy's work that *LA Noire* doesn't quite replicate: Cole Phelps is a character you rarely feel like you know or can sympathise with, and it's among the game's weaknesses. Ellroy finds a better balance of morally askew but likeable protagonists.

Finally, there are some strong imprints of television in *LA Noire*, partly in the procedural nature of the game's cases, but also in the casting. Team Bondi and Rockstar teamed up with *Mad Men* casting director Laura Schiff to find its ensemble. Rockstar's Dan Houser reportedly suggested *Mad Men* supporting player Aaron Staton for the role of Cole Phelps, and this got the ball rolling on hiring many other actors from the '60s-set advertising/existential crisis drama.

The game feels like a TV show, then, because they literally use TV show actors. The MotionScan technology captured their facial movements perfectly, and while this produces silly moments of cartoonish lie-telling during interrogations, it also lends *LA Noire* a credibility you couldn't emulate with unknowns.

LA Noire is collectively enriched by what it borrows from other media. It's fair to say that Team Bondi's game only reaches the heights of its influences in a visual sense – the characters and larger story never quite engage in the same way, but then they are up against some of the most acclaimed cinema of all time, as well as genre-defining crime fiction. It's more than enough to be able to step into a world of this detail and live in it for a while. ■

ABOVE *LA Noire*'s map has a fair few quiet areas, then some densely detailed urban hubs, much like the real thing.



From lavish balls full of intrigue and wonder to a one-eyed covert operative being gifted Cuban cigars, get yourself into the festive spirit with the most popping parties available on Xbox **MATTELLIOTT**

01

MASS EFFECT

Despite the whole 'all sentient life in peril' thing in the *Mass Effect* series, there's apparently always time to kick back. Shepard can boogie in the Omega club in the second game, and if you wiggle the stick fast enough in *Mass Effect 1*'s Afterlife it *looks* like you're dancing, even if you're not. But the best example is The Citadel DLC. It's the emotional high point of the series, reuniting Shepard with lost loves and former friends, celebrating all the bonds made in the intergalactic foxhole of Bioware's space opera. It's a fantastic touch after the impersonal ending of *Mass Effect 3*, and a reminder that Bioware has always been best at doing people, rather than action. And that, as anyone who's been trapped a party with strangers will tell you, is the key to any enjoyable shindig.



03

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION

Mass Effect's The Citadel DLC is the best example of an intimate get-together with close friends; the Winter Palace mission in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is the grand, impersonal opposite. As the Inquisitor, you're there playing The Great Game – a phrase used to describe the Machiavellian politics of Orlais. You have to lie, flatter and scheme, all in the name of politics. It has everything a good party should – lavish costumes; flirting with old ladies; the constant underlying threat of violence – and it's the perfect way to alleviate some of the pressure in a game full of doom, threat and demon-spewing rifts in the sky. Care to dance?



02

HITMAN

For a monosyllabic egg with a shattered moral compass, Agent 47 certainly knows how to party. Over the course of the *Hitman* games, he's been invited to more red-carpet events than the Kardashians. And the best example is in the 2017 reboot, if only because of the scale. The Paris area is everything you want from a *Hitman* level. You sashay in, looking amazing, change clothes twice and use the accoutrements of the party to murder your targets. What makes it especially cool is all the stuff going on behind the scenes: makeup artists desperately preparing models for the stage; catering staff rushing about to get everything ready in time. There's even an expansive back garden if you need to step outside to collect your thoughts. And by 'collect your thoughts', we mean murder a man and dump his body in the river.

04

FALLOUT 3

When you think of parties, the barren, irradiated wasteland of *Fallout* probably isn't the first thing that pops into your head. But during its intro, the third game has a great example of a cheerful kids' birthday party, complete with cake, hats and friends falling out. (Hah! Falling out. Like *Fallout*.) It's also a great way of cementing your relationship with your missing father; as any parent knows, gifts are the way to a child's heart. It makes you want to stay in Vault 101 forever, but we suppose that's exactly the point, right?



05

FABLE II

If *Fable II* was a popularity contest, the Party Animal Achievement would be the way to win. Just like in real life, making friends in *Fable II* is a mix of charisma and bribery. If you're popular enough, you can command people to follow you as you swagger/stomp around Albion. Gather five people into your party, take them to the pub and buy them a round of drinks. Voila! You have your very own *Fable II* jamboree, and a shiny new Achievement. Plus, you've helped these simple people escape the misery of their nasty, brutish lives, even if it's only for an afternoon. You hero, you.



06

MGS V

This is the most Hideo Kojima way of throwing a party. You pop your birthday in *Metal Gear Solid V* when you first start, then probably forget about it as you get lost in a world of espionage, conspiracy and fultoning sheep. But log into the game on your special day, and you'll come back to a deserted Mother Base – until Ocelot, Millar and your troops arrive, singing a terrible birthday ditty and presenting you with a special Diamond Dogs cake. If you're buddies with Quiet, she'll even shoot a birthday message into the side of a crate of Cuban cigars for you. Unconventional, but quite brilliant.

07

THE SIMS

Partying has always been part of *The Sims*. There was nothing quite like inviting over the Goths, locking Mortimer in the toilet and trying to seduce Bella while your significant other looked on in horror. And since then, whole expansions have been released, dedicated to partying hard in a virtual world, and the sequels have made the types of get-together more varied and nuanced. Christmas, pool, costume – there is no type of event that Sims won't throw a party for. You can even throw funeral parties when one of your darling virtual creations departs this mortal coil. Bet the Goths would love that.



08

PORTAL

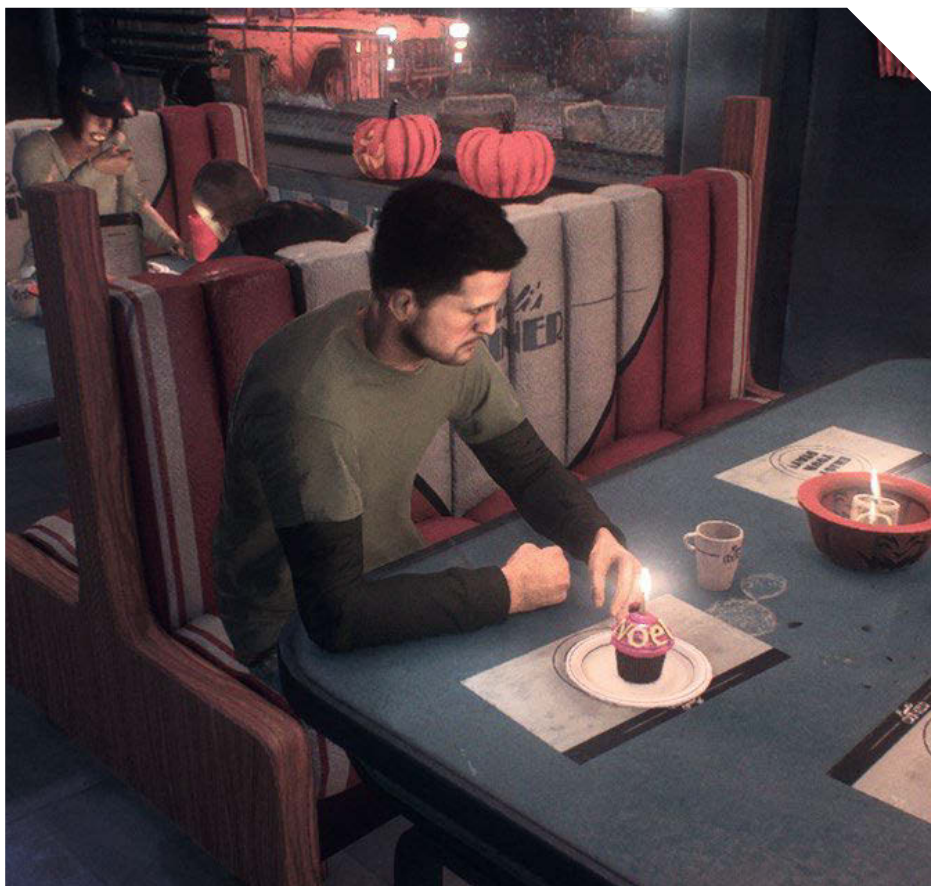
It's hard to avoid the obvious cake reference when this entry is specifically about that, so we won't even try. The cake is not a lie. And there's a secret *Portal* party happening at the end of the game: you're just not invited. After the credits have rolled in the first game, you'll see a delicious-looking chocolate cake in a room full of Personality Cores and the Companion Cube. We almost felt left out seeing them having so much fun – if 'fun' is the right word for inanimate objects in a warehouse – but then we remembered all the testing, burning and despair. We'll make our own cake.



09

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

There are brutal moments in *Arkham Knight*. The psychological trauma. The betrayal. The shattered kneecaps. But few things compare to the abject misery of Noel's party for one in the opening moments of the game. Explore Pauli's Diner at the start of the game and you'll come across the sad sight of a man named Noel, enjoying a one-person party with a sad, solitary candle shoved in a cupcake. The good news is he'll soon forget about how sad he is when Scarecrow's goons deploy fear gas in the diner. Wait, that's not good at all, is it?



111

10

MINECRAFT

As well as being deeply creative, *Minecraft* is a great way to hang out with friends. Open your world, invite a few friends and spend the day swapping gifts and building brilliant things. And the central point of any party, as everyone knows, is the cake. And the cake in *Minecraft* is brilliant because it can be shared by seven people (or, even better, hidden and eaten entirely by one). Throw in some fireworks, festive decorations and a few C418 tunes on the jukebox, and you get the perfect *Minecraft* party (even if it always seems to end with TNT and punching). ■





Games, films and television – everything you need for the ultimate Xbox One experience

THE TEN BEST XBOX ONE GAMES

games

01

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO

Hearts Of Stone and *Blood And Wine* have made an already outstanding RPG unmissable. One of the most authentic, entertaining game worlds ever.

DEFINING MOMENT Geralt in a bath tub. It changed our lives.



02

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES

Brutal and beautiful in equal measures, *GTA V* is so rich in size, scope and spectacle it's hard to believe it was originally built for Xbox 360.

DEFINING MOMENT Switching to Trevor to find him waking up on the side of a mountain wearing nothing but pants.



03

DARK SOULS III

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO

Get over the initial difficulty hump and you're rewarded with a combat system that gives you unparalleled opportunities to express yourself.

DEFINING MOMENT Beating a boss the size of a family home using only a rusty sword and your epic skills.



04

BATTLEFIELD 1

PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS

Alongside a surprisingly affecting single-player campaign comes one of the most robust and satisfying multiplayer offerings on Xbox One. Brave and unforgettable.

DEFINING MOMENT Taking out enemies from the saddle of a horse.



05

OVERWATCH

PUBLISHER BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Blizzard decides to have a go at making a multiplayer shooter and somehow ends up creating one of the best since *Team Fortress 2*. Just beginner's luck? We doubt it.

DEFINING MOMENT Getting sweet revenge on a camping opponent.



06

TITANFALL 2

PUBLISHER RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT

This sequel to the ace (but multiplayer-only) game compensates with arguably one of the best solo FPS campaigns ever. It's a wall-running, double-jumping, mech-punching delight.

DEFINING MOMENT Killing the entire enemy team with your robotic fists.



07

DISHONORED 2

PUBLISHER ARKANE STUDIOS

This supernatural stealth-'em-up is a superb action game and a landmark work of videogame world-building wrapped up in a sumptuous art style.

DEFINING MOMENT Exploring Karnaca's shifting clockwork mansion and finding your way between the walls.



08

GEARS OF WAR 4

PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS

A soft reboot that respects what made *Gears* great, then introduces new threats and surprises for the best game since *GOW 2*. An essential entry for Gear-heads and newcomers alike.

DEFINING MOMENT Fighting Swarm in the storm during the peaks of Act 4.



09

CUPHEAD

PUBLISHER STUDIO MDHR

A graphically stunning love story to side-scrolling platformers of old, this boss-focused shooter is a masterpiece of design and difficulty. You will die.

DEFINING MOMENT Finally beating the goddam boss you've been fighting for days and crying tears of unbridled joy.



10

HITMAN

PUBLISHER IO INTERACTIVE

IO's flashy reboot adds mystery and menace to *Hitman*'s bag of tricks. Each episode takes place in a different city, and each hit is more challenging. Easily the best *Hitman* game yet.

DEFINING MOMENT Getting a panicked kill and then desperately trying to escape.



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THE BEST FILMS AND TV THIS MONTH

films



A MONSTER CALLS

FOR FANS OF *Pan's Labyrinth*

In this beautifully told story of love and loss, a little boy who's struggling to cope with his mother's illness meets a tree that comes to life. Combining the gothic imagery of Tim Burton with the creatures of Guillermo del Toro, this may be the best film of 2017.



SPLIT

FOR FANS OF *Peeping Tom*

We didn't think M Night Shyamalan had another great film in him (*The Happening* still makes us shudder) but we were wrong. James McAvoy is chilling as the man with split personality disorder who kidnaps three teens and brings them to his basement lair.



20TH CENTURY WOMEN

FOR FANS OF *The Kids Are All Right*

Greta Gerwig has been crowned the queen of indie. Here, she joins Annette Bening and Elle Fanning in a film about different misfits who live in a boarding house. A touching coming-of-age treasure, *20th Century Women* could be the indie film of the year.



CRIMSON PEAK

FOR FANS OF *The Innocents*, *Rebecca*

Guillermo del Toro goes back to his roots in this blood-splattered love letter to gothic horror. When the young and romantic Edith marries a debonair stranger, he whisks her away to his dark, rambling mansion where secrets lurk in every corner. Sumptuous!



JACKIE

FOR FANS OF *The Crown*

This is the first film to strip away the myths surrounding JFK's death and focus on his widow, Jackie. Natalie Portman is perfect in the role of a widow, her refined, brittle disposition slowly melting away to reveal a woman daunted by her own legacy.



SILENCE

FOR FANS OF *Ben-Hur*, *Kingdom Of Heaven*

After the debauched, drug-addled *Wolf Of Wall Street*, Martin Scorsese could have made a much smaller film. Instead, he made a religious epic about two priests who travel to Japan to rescue their mentor. A brutal masterpiece exploring faith and guilt.



television



STRANGER THINGS S2

FOR FANS OF '80s movies, dark fantasy

It's been too long since we hung out with Eleven and the boys of Hawkins, Indiana. At the beginning of season two, Eleven is hiding in the woods for her own safety and monsters are starting to claw at the veil between our world and the Upside Down.



MR ROBOT S3

FOR FANS OF *Ghost In The Shell*

Mr Robot's season two finale left us with a lot of questions: what is the dark army really up to? How much does Angela know? And is Elliott even alive? This third dose of tech-noir will hopefully give us some answers and burrow deeper into the dark rabbit hole of Evil Corp.



MINDHUNTER

FOR FANS OF *Zodiac*, *The Black Dahlia*

David Fincher returns to Netflix to produce this inky-black crime series. It's the late '70s, and FBI agents Holden Ford and Bill Tench start interviewing serial killers to help solve an ongoing case. If this is anything like Fincher's *Zodiac*, we're very ready.



LOUIS THEROUX: DARK STATES

FOR FANS OF *Making A Murderer*

Not for those with a sensitive disposition, Louis Theroux visits three American cities for a new series of documentaries, interviewing heroin addicts, prostitutes and murderers. It's a grim watch, but always illuminating.



AMERICAN HORROR STORY: CULT

FOR FANS OF *Fight Club*, *The OA*

The horror anthology show returns for its seventh season, dropping us into a cult that's formed in the wake of Donald Trump's inauguration. It may be topical but expect blood, sex and a lot of creepy clowns.



STAR TREK: DISCOVERY

FOR FANS OF *Mass Effect*, *The Expanse*

If *Star Trek* summons cosy memories, *Discovery* will be like a beam of lens flare to the face. When Michael Burnham, the First Officer on the USS Shenzhou, uncovers the Klingon race, it leads to bloodshed and warfare. This is *Trek* for a new generation.



OXM TEAM
CHOICE

THE BEST GAMES WE'RE PLAYING AND WHY WE LOVE THEM



Steve's choice
STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II
Like many fans, I can't help but be

dragged in by a *Star Wars* game. I'm really enjoying the three eras stuff (yes, even the prequels) even if I'm not very good at using the heroes.



Dani's choice
ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS
I haven't been a fan of the series

in ages, but this one tempted me back in and I'm glad it did. Mostly because of the cute cats and camels. Hippos can get bent though.



Russell's choice
COD: WWII
After my recent trip down memory lane with *COD II*, I

thought I should probably head back to the beaches and give WWII a go. As expected, there is lots of shooting, loads of shouting, and the odd explosion.



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the disc slot

They make the games we love, but what do they play for fun? We ask developers to pick their faves from Xbox history. This month: **Mike Rayner**



Mike Rayner
Studio technical director, *The Coalition*
Mike is technical director for *Gears Of War 4*, and oversaw the recent Xbox One X upgrade to the title. Before moving over to join The Coalition, Mike worked on the *SSX* and *Need For Speed* series at EA.

Halo: Combat Evolved [1] on the original Xbox pioneered the mechanics of FPS shooters with game controllers, and delivered a level of immersion and technical capability that was not possible on any console before then. **Gears Of War** [2] did for the Xbox 360 what *Halo* did for Xbox. It defined the third-person shooter genre for a generation while redefining expectations of visual quality and HD graphics to deliver a level of detail not possible before the Xbox 360.

The *Skate* series redefined the skateboarding genre with an open world, an accurate physics-based skating model and innovative 'Flick It' controls. **Skate 3** [3] is the most refined – and arguably the best version – of the series.

Minecraft [4] is a game for everyone. With its innovative Voxel-block world, crafting system and 24-hour survival mechanics it taps into something instinctual and creative in everyone that plays it. I love how I can play this game with my kids, and how we can create mods together as a way of learning about technology and game design.

Destiny [5] blends proven first-person shooting, an online-only shared open world and RPG mechanics to create something innovative and satisfying. Technically I am very impressed with how this title breaks new ground with automatic match-making and 'playing with strangers' in a co-op open world story-based game.

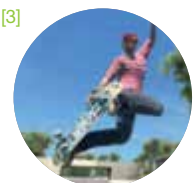
[1]



[2]



[3]



[5]



[4]

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